EXCHANGE

Community-led Collections Research

Recommendations for more equitable participation

SECTOR FACING REPORT

National Museums Scotland

ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

Contents

Top left: Tingatinga zine created by David Livingstone Birthplace Museum Exchange Group © National Museums Scotland – zine © David Livingstone Birthplace Museum. Top right: Workshop at City Art Centre Edinburgh © Museums & Galleries Edinburgh. Bottom: Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums Group © National Museums Scotland

01 Introduction

Introduction

The Exchange project funded museum partners around the UK to undertake community-led collections-based research and creative outputs. All Exchange projects used participatory research methodologies, working with African, Caribbean, and South Asian diaspora heritage community members to explore experiences of empire, migration, and life in Britain. The first stage of Exchange was funded by a £250,000 grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The project was supported by a Hub formed between National Museums Scotland and Royal Museums Greenwich. The Hub distributed a central fund to seven museum partners, provided guidance, and evaluated partner activities to generate recommendations for more equitable participation.

Museum partners recruited community members and, with the Hub, supported them to identify and explore research questions and define and produce outputs. The research was varied and included new community-led research into the historic and contemporary meanings of objects, archival materials, and absences and silences in the museum collections. Similarly, the outputs were many and varied including an artist-led zine, public events, musical and theatre performances, temporary exhibitions, permanent displays, academic seminars, panel discussions, spoken word poetry, filmmaking, stationery design and production, educational booklets and resources, a women's trail, an interfaith ceremony, and a published book. Exchange evaluated these activities to address the project's key question - **How can participation be more equitable for diaspora heritage community members? -** with the aim of increasing the plurality of voices in collections-based research and outputs and collaboration across the museum sector more generally.

This report shares the Exchange experience and the recommendations emerging from the evaluation to inform future work between communities and museum partners.

"We want to support greater equality, diversity and inclusion within the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector in the UK. To do this we need to consider who is visiting our institutions and what they find there when they do. We need to invest more work in how histories of empire, migration and life in Britain are told from the perspective of diaspora communities. This generous grant from the AHRC will allow organisations to work with UK communities who have historically been marginalised in museum and gallery displays to reveal and share a wider range of stories and perspectives."
Dr John Giblin, Principal Investigator for Exchange

02 Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Workshop at the National Museum of the Royal Navy
© National Museums Scotland

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Interfaith Spiritual event held by Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums group to pay respects to their ancestors © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Recruitment

Seven museums successfully responded to open calls to be project partners. Each project partner committed to undertake community-led collections-based research and to generate creative outputs with African, Caribbean, and South Asian diaspora heritage community members to explore experiences of empire, migration, and life in Britain.

In applying to Exchange, the museum partners also agreed to participate in Hub evaluation activities and sharing days that aimed to address the overarching research question: how can participation be more equitable for diaspora heritage community members?

Some museum partners recruited community participants through community groups they already had a working relationship with while others had open calls for recruits. A condition of funding was that all museum partners negotiate fair remuneration with their community participants.

Project start-up

From October 2021 to January 2022, museum partners worked to define the focus of their projects, with community members leading the identification of research questions, methods and potential creative outputs. The Hub designed and co-ordinated an 'Inspiration Day', bringing together each community and museum partner and guest speakers, to share experiences and inspire each other prior to the individual participatory project delivery.

Each museum partner applied for funds to the Hub (up to £17,000 each). The Hub ensured the projects met key criteria (i.e., community-led collections-based research and creative outputs, using participatory methodologies, working with African, Caribbean, and South Asian diaspora community members to explore experiences of empire, migration, and life in Britain).

Project delivery

From February to July 2022, in participation with their respective museums, community members led the research and production of creative outputs.

Evaluation of the projects was undertaken by the Hub throughout the project through questionnaires, meeting and workshop attendance, online knowledge sharing events, and focus groups.

The outputs across the seven partners were varied and ambitious:

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

David Livingstone Birthplace Museum, Blantyre (DLBM)

Community participants
– Six people recruited through open call via local and national job seekers' platforms.

Project
– Shifted the narrative to explore how African peoples and countries that David Livingstone visited were impacted by European exploration and colonialism rather than focusing on the man himself. The participants researched on objects such as a fibrous grain urn belonging to either Abdullah Susi or James Chuma, a Mbila (xylophone) collected by David Livingstone, as well as objects more normally seen as mundane, such as spoons and other household implements.

Creative outputs
– A Tingatinga public event, in partnership with the Congolese Community of Motherwell, where research outputs were presented to residents and other visitors through storytelling and an artist-led zine (short magazine), alongside musical performances and food. Acquisitions were made for the permanent collection, including Josie Ko's oil painting from the Tingatinga style art installation. Ko's painting brings to the fore the hidden figures in Livingstone's story, complementing the object-based research the group carried out and the film they commissioned about the urn, which will go on permanent display.

All images of David Livingstone Birthplace Museum. Top left and bottom image © National Museums Scotland, top right David Livingstone Birthplace Museum © Walnut Wasp

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Museums and Galleries Edinburgh (MGE)

Community participants

– Forty people from Edinburgh Caribbean Association.

Project

– Explored childhood experiences and issues of race through collections and by identifying and making new acquisitions of childhood material culture at the Museum of Childhood. The group undertook visits and object handling sessions investigating current museum objects, sharing community members' objects, and discussing memories and identified gaps in the Edinburgh collection. Creative writing poetry sessions with a counsellor were also included to address the emotional impact of these memories.

Creative outputs

– A temporary exhibition, *Respect! Caribbean Life in Edinburgh*, incorporating four themes: Seeing Ourselves, Growing Up Caribbean, British & Caribbean Identity and Celebrating Ourselves. The Museum of Childhood has incorporated the community work into their museum practice for future permanent changes to displays, terminology, and collections information systems. Additional outputs were a film, creative writing completed by the group, a Spotify playlist and new acquisitions of dolls, books, artwork and magazines representing diversity in Britain.

All images of Museums & Galleries Edinburgh Exchange Group. Top left © National Museums Scotland, top right and bottom © Museums & Galleries Edinburgh

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Glasgow Museums (GM)

Community participants

– Two people from Bangladesh Association Glasgow (BAG) and three young people from the Our Shared Cultural Heritage (OSCH) programme.

Project

– Research into early South Asian presence in Glasgow through objects such as a 'Lascars Only' plaque, the earliest evidence of Lascars (South Asian Sailors) in Scotland.

Creative outputs

– A theatre performance on the Tall Ship in Glasgow, an academic seminar, spoken word poetry, a zine, a series of blogs, a display at Glasgow Mela, filmmaking and stationery produced as a visual representation of the research completed. The plaque and community-led research will go on permanent display in Glasgow Museums.

Top: Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection.
Bottom: Lascar Heritage Seminar arranged by Bangladesh Association Glasgow © National Museums Scotland

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Museum of the Home, London (MotH)

Community participants

– Eight Bangladeshi young people from the Brady Arts Community Centre.

Project

– Researching and enhancing existing archives focused on photographs and testimony to explore the homes of Bangladeshi women. Skills and creative workshops with the group of young people who were supported to produce oral histories and the film.

Creative outputs

– A collection of oral history interviews, a film made by the young people, a display at the museum and new collections information system records.

Left: Museum of the Home
© Hufton+Crow, right and bottom:
© National Museums Scotland

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth (NMRN)
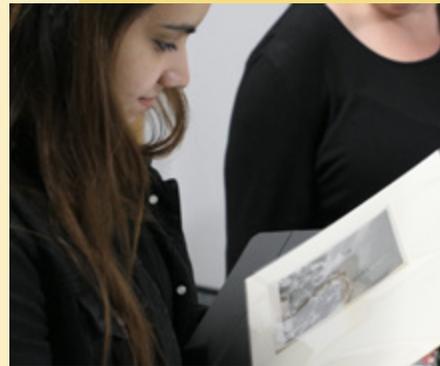
Community participants

– Sixteen people from the Chat over Chai group and four from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Network for the Royal Navy.

Project

– Researching three objects: HMS *Trincomalee,* a British naval vessel made in India; *Appreciating the Situation* (1955), a painting by R. Chaudhury; and *The Empire's Strength and Sinews of War* (1940), a poster by Dora Batty depicting women picking tea in India.

Creative outputs

– Three short films about the objects, project and the findings of the research. Chat Over Chai also worked collectively to create an alternative design for the *The Empire's Strength and Sinews of War* poster. Exchange funded the conservation of *Appreciating the Situation* to enable it to go on permanent display alongside the community-led research.

National Museum of the Royal Navy © National Museums Scotland

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

SS Great Britain, Bristol (SSGB)

Community participants

– Three parents representing the 'Bridging Gaps' school community group based at Hannah More Primary School in Bristol.

Project

– Researching the ship as an object, its archives, and associated collections to explore and share issues of migration. Through detailed research on a shell with an Arabic inscription that one of the parents translated, previously unknown connections were uncovered between the *SS Great Britain* and the transport of Ottoman General Omar Pasha and troops during the Crimean War. Other research included the discovery of new details about the identity of William Jones, a passenger of colour, who travelled with the ship during the 19th century.

Creative outputs

– An outdoor exhibition *Discovering SS Great Britain: Bristol Stories, Personal Journeys*, a published book, *Tying the Tides: the colour within the SS Great Britain*, educational booklets, and resource kits for school children, which will be shared on the museum website. The new research results will also be incorporated into the permanent displays.

SS Great Britain. Top right © Adam Gasson / SS Great Britain Left and bottom: © National Museums Scotland

Exchange Projects 2021–2022

Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM)

Community participants

– Nine participants recruited through open call.

Project

– Researching indentureship through archives, including records of African nurses in the 1950s working in local hospitals and ship crew lists. This revealed major gaps in TWAM's social history collection in terms of representing diaspora and specifically women of colour. In response the group selected, researched and interviewed prominent contemporary women from the Tyne and Wear diaspora heritage community to add new archival material to TWAM's collection.

Creative outputs

– A permanent women's trail exhibition based on the new archival materials, launch event, a seminar/panel discussion, and an interfaith ceremony.

Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums Right: Interfaith Spiritual Event © National Museums Scotland. Bottom Left © www.nigeljohn.com

03 Key Findings

What did you think of the films?

Please leave us your comments

Fantastic film, really well made and informative, well done the whole team!

Really enjoyed them all – such interesting subjects, I learned a lot today. Thank you to all who contributed.

Lovely project a films.

We need more of this in all our museums.

A huge thank you to the effort and time that was put in the project.

A Huge thank You to NMRN Royal Navy, Chat over chai and all for a fantastic event!

Why is it important for Museums and Communities to create films like these?

Please leave us your comments

Thank you for being brave - these stories need to be heard.

Diversity and understanding ♡ We need community voices and involvement in all our museums.

Just need a microphone next time, difficult to hear the speakers, otherwise fantastic event! Thankyou So younger generations can learn about it.

Feedback Forms from Film Viewing Event at National Museum of the Royal Navy © National Museums Scotland

Key findings

Community and museum participants were part of a detailed evaluation process throughout the Exchange project and were encouraged to feedback individually and through group events.

A wide range of benefits of community-led participation emerged: enhanced relationships, contributions to public debates/discourse, developed practice and organisational strategies, positive stories, new perspectives, new knowledge generated, inspiration for future projects/initiatives, confidence-building, wider community engagement and career opportunity development. Community participants highlighted the importance of being heard, and of telling their stories to enrich public discourse, as well as the benefits participation provided in terms of career development opportunities. Museum participants focused on the benefits to museum practice and strategy alongside the new collection perspectives acquired during the project.

Evaluation showed that most respondents directly encountered barriers or challenges to participation during their project. Community participants emphasised very particular feelings and sentiments around representation and racial discrimination. They also highlighted specific challenges of intra-community issues in mixed groups, for example differing perspectives, and the need for family and childcare support to be involved. Museum participants tended to focus on the technical, financial, and logistical challenges and barriers that they directly experienced participating in and managing the projects.

Time, space, remuneration, museum processes, finances, decision-making and the Covid-19 pandemic featured as challenges in both the community and museum participants' accounts. Additional challenges were logistics, communication and the size of the collections and their relevance. Systemic challenges to participating with museums were most frequently articulated by community participants and included perceptions about museums, lack of diaspora representation in the museum workforce and museum displays, triggering topics, financial challenges and cultural differences.

There was unanimous agreement by both community and museum participants regarding the importance and relevance of the themes of empire, migration and life in Britain. For the community participants these themes spoke to their lived experience and heritage and both community and museum participants considered them important themes that museums should be addressing through collections research. Community participants also highlighted the importance of their expertise in public discourse related to these topics and museum collections. Museum participants noted the implications of the community-led approach on what were perceived to be 'core' museum interests and practice, particularly noting that their collections or research topics might not always match the interests of the community involved. They noted the need for flexibility to harness the value of community-led research but also the importance of agreeing mutual goals at the start and then continually reviewing and refining these together to ensure a shared and specific focus. Museum and community participants highlighted the importance of duty-of-care for community participants in their engagement with their collections and themes. In response, they both identified a need to put extra support measures in place when accessing these collections due to triggering or emotive material.

04 Recommendations

Recommendations

The following are a series of recommendations that emerged from the evaluation, which seek to contribute toward more equitable participation for diaspora heritage community members:

1   **Participatory practice methods**

2   **Representation**

3   **Time allocated to projects**

4   **Creating safe spaces**

5   **Remuneration**

6   **Demystifying Research Questions, Methods, and Outputs**

7   **Flexibility**

8   **Recruitment and communications**

9   **Needs analysis**

1 Participatory practice and empowerment

Participatory practice encompasses co-curation, co-design, co-production and collaboration. These practices bring together museum professionals' expertise alongside communities of interests' lived experience as expertise.

Participatory institutions collect and share diverse, personalised, and changing content that showcases the creations and opinions of people who are experts through their lived experience. In so doing, participatory institutions broaden diversity to represent a variety of individual norms, values and beliefs and a mixture of intersectional identities and histories, ensuring collections are meaningful and relevant to more people.

Becoming a more participatory institution requires addressing power dynamics between museum and community participants. There will always be power dynamics and imbalances in participatory practice, but what was important for participants was that these power dynamics were recognised and, where possible and appropriate, mitigated. For example, often in community-led projects the budget is controlled by museums but some of our partners enabled community participants to make decisions about how budget would be spent, formally asking participants whether funds could be spent on staffing or delegating budget funds to community partners so they could direct and implement their own ideas. In general, the key was prioritising and negotiating shared or distributed decision-making from the start and maintaining that over the life of the project and any legacy work.

When successful, participatory practice is an open and democratic process. In the Exchange project, there was no 'one size fits all' participatory method but there were some underlying principles that led to successful, more equitable collaboration and outcomes.

- All community participants should be recognised as experts whose expertise is privileged alongside professional museum expertise

- Potential methods and principles of participation should be shared, discussed, negotiated and agreed with community participants before starting a project. What is agreed can then be formalised by creating an individual set of participation principles for each project

- There are lots of approaches to participation, such as the Museum Association's 'Power to the People' framework, and each has different benefits and limitations. The Exchange project found that whatever methods and principles of participation are employed, the key is designing and agreeing them together from the outset and then being flexible as the project proceeds

- A fundamental consideration for all participatory projects is community participant empowerment. Strategies for empowerment are important to ensure that community participants have control over the project in terms of design, implementation, evaluation and representation.

To specifically address and rebalance power dynamics, you may also want to consider:

- Identifying areas of power and control with participants and agreeing where those should be maintained or could be mitigated

- Exploring institutional and individual feelings and fears about handing over power

- The time and skills needed to build trust and consensus

- Agreeing mechanisms for making shared decisions.

Empowerment example

'We wanted to open ourselves up to greater public scrutiny and find critical friends and professional peer reviewers who can help us in that journey. And we wanted to create and strengthen anti-racist culture across the organisation through training, resource sharing, greater exposure to issues, standing items on meeting agendas and reinforcing processes for reporting and responding to incidents of racism. And a key initial commitment is to the decolonisation of our collections and their interpretation.'
Museum Participant, TWAM

Interfaith Spiritual Event
© National Museums Scotland

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) empowered their community participants by giving them budgetary control and inviting them to form a steering committee to contribute to the development of TWAM's decolonisation strategy. Throughout TWAM's project, community participants were consulted about the use of the project budget, whether that was for equipment, staff time, or other costs. All costs were approved by community participants before being incurred. The steering committee that the community participants formed met regularly with

TWAM's senior leadership team members over the life of the Exchange project and have been recruited to continue that role into the future. Find out more about TWAM's Exchange project here discoverymuseum.org.uk/exchange-community-led-collections-research

2 Representation

A key concern for the Exchange project was understanding and addressing barriers to participation. For museum participants, barriers were often expressed in terms of technical issues, for example, expenses and remuneration. However, for diaspora heritage community participants the most significant barrier to participation was a lack of representation, including an absence of representation in museum collections, displays, and published material, but particularly in terms of lack of representation amongst the predominantly white project staff, permanent staff, volunteers, and visitors.

- In the long-term this can only be resolved by increasing diversity and representation, for example by: reviewing trustee, staff and volunteer demographics; actively encouraging engagement and job applications from individuals from diverse backgrounds; valuing lived experience and transferable skills alongside formal qualifications and more traditional museum career paths; modifying job advert materials and channels to attract underrepresented groups; and working in partnership and creating programming with others that engages people from different backgrounds from an early age so they are comfortable in museums and see them as a potential career path.

- In the short term, the Exchange project found that where issues of representation were known to exist, community members valued museum partners who were open with them about these issues and the ways that they were working to address them, including short, medium, and long-term strategies.

- For Exchange, issues of representation were also observed within projects, for example, the balance of the number of majority-white professional museum staff compared to community participants in meetings, types of project roles, and decision-making authority. To address this, consider reducing the number of museum staff present compared to community participants, not presuming to chair meetings (instead delegate that role to community participants), and/or setting rules for decision-making that require there to be a two-thirds majority of community participants in support

Addressing issues of representation example

All Exchange projects addressed issues of representation through their research and creative outputs, including through permanent interventions in galleries and temporary exhibitions and events. In terms of visitors and staffing, at one project partner museum community participants explained how being surrounded by majority-white staff, volunteers, and visitors, initially made them feel uncomfortable. As African, Caribbean and South Asian diaspora heritage community members, they found that at least on one occasion they were being stared at and spoken about by majority-white audiences at the museum and in the café. The project partner addressed this over the course of their project by explaining their approach to decolonisation and their aim to increase representation in all areas of their work. It was also partly addressed through Exchange events that increased visitation from a wider range of communities.

'A little child did come in and say "oh there's black people there"... the other day... another volunteer, actually asked me, "oh, so what are you doing here?"... I didn't feel very comfortable really'.
Community Participant

Museum of the Home Gallery
© National Museums Scotland

3 Time allocated to projects

All community and museum participants cited the limited time available as an issue for the development of more equitable projects. This was about time for gaining familiarity with the collection, project design and delivery but also time for legacy building. However, the tight timeframe of this project was also cited as being a driver to action and had its own benefits.

> '*Building in time to get to know the group and time to respond and be truly equitable … it took us a lot of sessions. I think we underestimated how long even the process of each session would take … we were trying to obviously let the community lead … it was time consuming.*'
> Museum Participant, GM

> '*For me, I think within the six months,…we will all have a lot of knowledge from each other. And if you put it together and what is the end of it. Is it going to be just used in the museum?…Is this going to be a policy? We want to contribute in the communities…*'
> Community Participant, DLBM

Exchange found that to support more equitable community-led collections research, time should be more equally balanced between collection familiarisation and project design activities, project delivery and sustainable legacy building. For example, considerable time was required to support community participants to develop collections familiarity and confidence. This was required to enable them to enter more equitable conversations with museum staff about what potential research questions, methods and creative outputs they would like their projects to involve. Similarly, community members from all projects cited a desire for more time at the end of the research and creative output phases to disseminate their projects and build sustainable legacy and impact within and beyond their communities.

This contrasts with the original structure of the Exchange project. Originally approximately 25% of project time was allocated for familiarisation and project design against 75% for project delivery and no allocation for additional dissemination, sustainable legacy building and impact activities beyond the final creative outputs. (An additional six-months' £150,000 funding was subsequently granted by the AHRC to address these latter issues). Additional key recommendations include:

- Create a timeline, with meetings and milestones discussed, agreed and scheduled that takes into consideration different commitments and priorities across community participants

- Develop non-traditional project planning and project governance processes that are bespoke to community needs in contrast to more traditional ones that have been created to serve museum priorities and processes

- Prioritise delivery to the time and availability of the participants and do not presume to work within standard museum hours

- Factor in proper time for discussing, reflecting and decision-making throughout the delivery phase to provide space for the community participants to review and consider next actions at each step, with the option of adjusting plans along the way.

Maximising time example

Collections research can absorb an infinite amount of time so should be balanced against start-up work, output production, dissemination, sustainable legacy building and impact activities.

SS Great Britain (SSGB) was one partner that highlighted the issue of time. They described how Exchange's tight time frame was challenging for the delivery of post-research activities but also motivated them to achieve more in a short space of time, helping them to maintain momentum with their community participants and wider community group through Hannah More Primary School. With an additional six-months' funding dedicated to dissemination, sustainable legacy building, and impact, SSGB and their community researchers are now creating resources to share the stories discovered through their research. These will be shared through events with wider, under-represented communities in the Lawrence/Barton Hill and St. Paul's areas of Bristol. Data shows that fewer people from these areas visit, volunteer or work at SSGB.

Exhibition launch event at SS Great Britain
© National Museums Scotland

4 Creating safer spaces

Undertaking community-led collections research with underrepresented communities on sensitive subjects often leads to discussions that evoke difficult individual or collective-community memories and strong emotional responses. This was the case with Exchange, which worked with diaspora heritage communities on the themes of empire, migration and life in Britain. In these circumstances, it is important to provide support and to take care of the wellbeing of both community and museum participants. However, in creating the conditions for more equitable participation, this was especially important for diaspora heritage community members who were explicitly or implicitly being asked by museums to engage with issues of historic discrimination and exclusion related to their contemporary identities.

Although potentially triggering and traumatic, community participants from across the projects reported that it was important to engage with these topics and collections and to discuss and address these issues. Rather than avoid sensitive topics, what was important was the way in which these topics were engaged with and the support that was provided by each museum. You may want to:

- Procure the direct support of a counsellor or expert Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) facilitator to coach, nurture or provide direct support to participants. All Exchange projects addressed safeguarding in some form. However, Exchange observed that community members responded most positively to externally provided support, either arranged by the museum or the community. Some projects introduced external support latterly, having learnt about the approach of other projects

- Produce a safer spaces statement detailing how your museum will approach community-led research, how you will deal with triggering topics and signposting to methods to communicate the need for intervention or to contact support sources. This might include how you will provide trigger warnings for community participants in terms of themes, topics, objects and other materials that they might encounter in the museum and during their research, creative outputs and dissemination

- Produce a joint 'Principles for Discussion' guide detailing how you will approach discussions, what is appropriate and what is not. You might want to include a list of agreed terms to provide clarity on words to be used and words that are not preferred

- Create time and space for reflection with groups and individuals to ensure people feel comfortable and able to share their feelings. This may be outside of museum spaces.

Obviously, there is elements of slavery and genocide that's come as part of the empire as well. And those are very sensitive topics. And I think we should be really mindful if we don't have therapists in the group to kind of open up trauma and then leave us vulnerable because that is a place where some of us may have witnessed those things.
Community Participant, NMRN

Safer spaces example

Museums Galleries Edinburgh (MGE) partnered with Edinburgh Caribbean Association (ECA) for their Exchange project. In recognition of the sensitive topics to be discussed, MGE employed the founder of ECA, Lisa Williams, as a consultant to steer project design and development. At the project design stage MGE and ECA identified a need for emotional support for both museum and community participants due to the topics of empire, migration and life in Britain. A professional therapist was budgeted for in the application and over the course of the project, they held four optional poetry therapy sessions for museums and community participants alongside a series of project focused discussion sessions.

Lisa Williams (Edinburgh Caribbean Association) and members of the Caribbean community in Edinburgh © Museums & Galleries Edinburgh

'It will be an emotional journey…we should think very carefully about how we are going to manage those emotions that come on and how we are going to support each other through it, whether we need external support…because it will start digging up stuff that is unhealed… We are in a society that still operates on racism and colourism, and we need to be able to have those conversations with each other as well, in an honest and caring way…so we are creating a safe space, and a brave space, and we are taking care of each other as we go through this process as well.'
Community Participant, MGE

5 Remuneration

A key principle of Exchange was that all community participants should be fairly remunerated for their participation in addition to receiving reimbursement for expenses. In practice, however, what was fair and what was possible differed from project to project, from museum to museum and from community group to community group. In response, museum participants were asked to explain how they had negotiated fair remuneration with their community participants, with each project adopting a different approach.

Across all Exchange projects, fair remuneration was found to be essential to create the conditions for more equitable participation. Community participants were not volunteers. Instead, the lived experience of the community participants was essential expertise required by each museum to deliver core priorities, such as diversifying or 'decolonising' collections and displays. To be equitable their labour therefore required remuneration just as other experts would be paid for their contributions.

All museums reported that they had worked with and remunerated community participants in previous projects. However, most also reported being challenged by remuneration particularly in reference to tax and employment laws; challenges that many museums and other participatory institutions face across the UK. To address these challenges, you may want to:

- Before you start a project, ensure that you have a remuneration procedure in place and that you have negotiated and agreed what is fair remuneration with community participants that will work within your institutional limitations

  - Institutions may consider discussing an agreed level of remuneration with HMRC. Although remuneration of any kind (e.g. payments, gifts or vouchers) has tax implications for individuals and institutions, HMRC may agree a nominal figure for a one off or occasional payment

  - Will your community participants consider invoicing you for their time, which means they take account of their own tax and benefits as self-employed participants? If yes, does the amount you agree on for invoice reflect equitable participation in relation to other contractors? If yes, it is likely you will need to submit a purchase order so make time to explain this process and to exchange financial details to set this up. You may also want to consider providing training or signposting to guidance on how to register as self-employed

  - Would your participants prefer that their community organisation be remunerated on their behalf, which would then take account of tax and benefits? If yes, it is likely you will need to submit a purchase order so make time to exchange financial details to set this up

- Produce a list of the 'out of pocket expenses' you will be willing to cover and at what rates as well as what you will not be willing to cover. Be clear that expenses need a separate process and do not sit within remuneration – they do not normally have tax implications. Check your organisation's policy on paying expenses to externals

- Produce 'how to' guidance on submitting remuneration requests and, separately, on submitting expenses claims for your institution detailing the above options and what processes or forms require to be completed

- Signpost to external advice on personal employment tax or benefits thresholds.

Remuneration example

A requirement of Exchange was that all museums negotiate and agree fair remuneration for time worked on the project with their community participants before applying for funding. This was in addition to other expenses. This resulted in a variety of successful but contrasting approaches. Glasgow Museums remunerated their participants by registering them as employees and paying them an hourly living wage rate. David Livingstone Birthplace Museum remunerated their participants by paying them as freelancers at a daily rate for a set number of project meetings and events agreed at the start of the project. National Museum of the Royal Navy remunerated their participants, at their request, by making a series of donations to the charities that the participants represented.

Workshop at David Livingstone Birthplace Museum
© National Museums Scotland

6 Demystifying research questions, methods, and outputs

A key objective of Exchange was to empower community participants to design their own collections-based research questions, methods, and creative outputs.

To create successful and equitable projects, significant time needed to be invested at the start of each project to familiarise community participants with museum collections. The idea of 'research' also needed to be demystified and options for research questions, methods and creative outputs needed to be considered.

'Myself, I'm very into the project. I'm not sure how I would get with research because obviously it's something very new for me. So, I'm not worried about like English, but just… the process of doing research. So, I wish to think that I can do it…I'm very, very happy to do it. I just don't know if I'm capable of doing this or?'
Community Participant, SSGB

Collection familiarisation was undertaken through a mixture of digital and in person workshops, but many projects reported that even more time invested at the outset would have been beneficial.

To demystify research, Exchange defined collection-based research as a process of asking questions about an area of interest and attempting to find answers to those questions. (Nevertheless, participants reported that the demystification of the research process was something that really happened over the life of the projects).

Both museum and community participants found having themes useful as a starting point. Participants also reported that they benefitted from having research topic options presented to them that were specific to each collection. However, the options were typically only useful as starting points for discussion, with most community participants choosing to develop their own research questions. In many cases, the topics, questions, methods and outputs also changed over the life of each project.

Because Exchange was community-led in both the research undertaken and the outputs created, the range and ambition of creative media employed was diverse. Community participants chose their own media, designed and performed or displayed their pieces, which spanned artforms including theatre, creative writing, storytelling/spoken word, illustration, product design, commissioning musical performances, curation, blogs, filmmaking,

published books, resource kits for public engagement, trails, events, ceremonies and lectures.

You may want to:

- Discuss at the start what research means for your institution and for the community participants and come to a shared understanding

- Provide broad themes as a starting point that can be tested for community relevance and changed if needed

- Give community participants an overview of the collections and the museum's institutional history so they have a baseline understanding

- Make time and space for deeper dives into parts of the collection that participants seem most interested in

- Provide a suite of ideas, methods, and outputs but expect to pivot to new ideas put forward by community members

- Develop a research brief that sets out why you are undertaking research, what you are researching, how you will facilitate your research (where, who and when) and how and when you will review the brief to make sure it remains relevant. It should also include a short summary of what research is in scope and what is out of scope. Every time you review your research brief you should decide what to prioritise and what to move to 'out of scope' as you home in on your shared key interests.

Demystifying research example

The seven Exchange projects all produced collections-based research results. Some projects undertook traditional object-based research. For example, at David Livingstone Birthplace Museum community participants identified an urn that belonged to Abdullah Susi or James Chuma, two African men who worked on Livingstone's expeditions. To understand more about Susi and Chuma's lives before they joined Livingstone, the community participants commissioned scientific research via the Hub to identify the materials the urn was made from. At SS Great Britain (SSGB), a community researcher who could read Arabic translated writing on a shell from the ship's collection and discovered that it included the name of Omar Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman Forces in the Crimea in the 19th century. This discovery suggests Omar Pasha used the ship to move forces around the Mediterranean and dramatically increases knowledge of the diversity of people who used the SSGB: a key aim of their project.

Elsewhere, some community participants found the collections at their museums to be inadequate to address their interests and questions and so undertook research to address these gaps. For example, at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, community participants wanted to research the lives of contemporary women of colour, but those stories weren't represented in the collection or archive, so they undertook ethnographic research about women in their community and added those new records to the collection. Similarly, Edinburgh Caribbean Association wanted to research Caribbean lives at Edinburgh Museums and Galleries but couldn't see their heritage in the collection, so they researched and made new acquisitions of dolls, books, artwork and magazines to represent diversity in Britain.

Crucially, for all these examples and many others in Exchange, community participant work resulted in new knowledge which was shared through temporary events and interventions and longer term or permanent strategies. These creative outputs were an important part of the demystification of research. In some cases, it was not until their books were published or exhibitions were opened that community participants reported really feeling like they had undertaken research.

Viewing collections at David Livingstone Birthplace Museum © National Museums Scotland

7 Flexibility

'As long as we have a process whereby it remains community-led so that things aren't presented at the last minute, or hard and fast so that there's opportunities to reflect and to feedback so that…it's community-led. It's not an easy thing, is it? Because it's different communities and different people. It isn't one community-led. It's different community leaders.'
Community Participant, TWAM

Flexibility is referenced throughout this report and is so important that it also has a recommendation of its own. Undertaking community-led collections research requires all parties and stakeholders (including funders) to allow project goals and outputs to be non-specific at the initiation stage and to maintain flexibility throughout the life of the project.

Community participants will become more familiar with collections over the life of a project and thus should have the authority to change research focus, questions, methods and outputs as projects, interests and knowledge develop. Making fixed decisions at the start of the project unfairly privileges museum participant interests and knowledge at the expense of dynamic community-led decision-making.

Exchange promoted flexibility by encouraging generic budgeting, supporting changes to research topics, questions, methods, and outputs, and reducing reporting requirements in relation to changes. Community and museum participants all responded positively to this pragmatic approach.

To address these challenges, you may want to:

- Ensure your funder or governing organisation supports a flexible approach from the start

- Negotiate and list any key milestones or activities that are essential for your project from the start and keep them as part of the scope of any decision making but be clear that non-essential plans can be changed

- Build in scheduled and ad-hoc moments for reflection where project aims, objectives and outputs can be reviewed and revised if desired. Return to the question 'why' are we doing this and allow for flexibility with the 'what', 'who', 'how' and 'when' of activity planning

- Create a shared purpose and key aims for your project and partnership to guide your work that you can refer to when you need to make decisions

- Manage and produce budgets with headline areas and not line by line details

Open to changes example:

National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) worked with two community groups, Chat over Chai and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Network for the Royal Navy. NMRN created a list of possible projects and shared these with the community participants at a collections familiarisation and project design workshop. The list of topics gave the community participants a way into thinking about the collection but did not immediately resonate with them. By the end of the workshop the group had settled on a Tidal Teatime project, researching the theme of tea and empire in the collections. However, over subsequent meetings, community participants changed their minds, and the project went in new directions, eventually researching three objects: *HMS Trincomalee,* a British naval vessel made in India; *Appreciating the Situation* (1955), a painting by R. Chaudhury; and *The Empire's Strength and Sinews of War* (1940), a poster by Dora Batty depicting women picking tea in the colonies (India). Building in flexibility for changing research topics also meant building in flexibility for outputs. It was impossible for the community participants to know what outputs they wanted before they knew what they were going to research, but by remaining flexible the community members delivered films, new visual works, and the permanent display of *Appreciating the Situation* alongside their research results.

The crucial point here is that change is not bad and may instead be the making of a project.
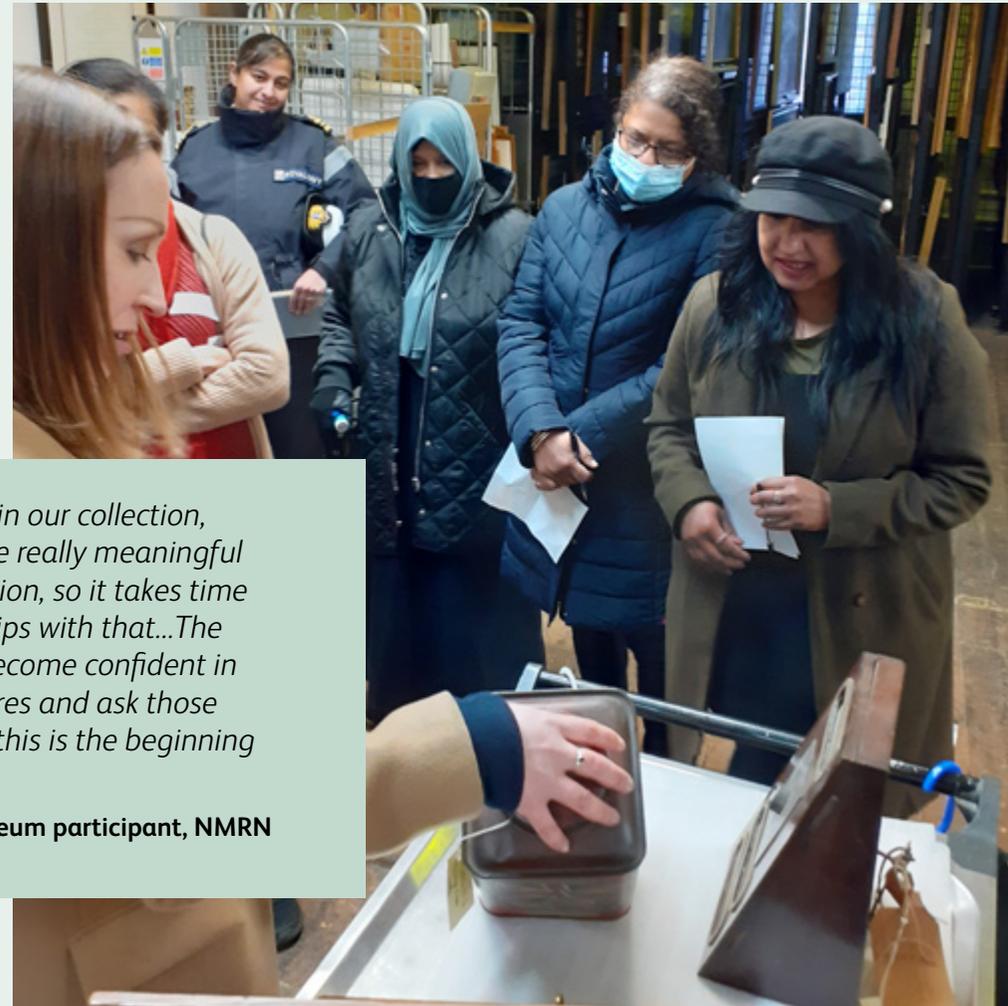
'We've got two million items in our collection, and we wanted to have some really meaningful engagement with the collection, so it takes time to explore that and get to grips with that...The group have only really just become confident in being able to go into the stores and ask those questions now. So hopefully this is the beginning rather than the end.'

End of project focus group, museum participant, NMRN

Workshop at National Museum of the Royal Navy © National Museums Scotland

8 Recruitment and communications

How community participants are recruited can have a material effect on the opportunities and challenges for equitable participation. For Exchange, due to the short timeframe, museum partners were encouraged to recruit community participants and groups they had an existing relationship with to ensure partnerships were not tokenistic and to maximise the potential for legacy. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this wasn't possible in all circumstances. In response, two project partners recruited through an open call, with a role description, interview and remuneration terms. In essence, this approach created new multi-ethnic 'community groups', compared to other partners who approached established community organisations. Both options were valid as no community is homogenous and community members and groups can only represent small parts of the community, but both had different benefits and limitations.

For example, members of the 'new community' groups reported that it was exciting to learn from others across different ages, backgrounds, or ethnicities and about each other's different concerns. However, deciding on questions, methods and outputs was more challenging because of different priorities. By contrast, members of established community groups tended to know each other already and have a more aligned purpose but didn't have the benefit of learning from new people.

In addition, some new and established community groups used an established 'community gatekeeper' or an individual contact who provided a direct route to the group and who undertook most of the communication and administrative labour. Other projects had a more distributed approach to communications and labour. All approaches had benefits and limitations.

To address some of these challenges, you may want to:

- Tailor your recruitment strategy and its communication plan to the demographics of individuals/groups that you want to work with

- Identify the best location to engage your key demographics i.e., in the museum or in a community space they already know

- Consider the skills, confidence levels and interest of individuals/groups

- Consider access in terms of language, disability, socio-economic factors or time commitments

- Use existing relationships or create new ones through introductions or taster sessions to help engagement

- Identify existing community groups, organisations, charities, networks or other intermediary organisations who can support recruitment

- Identify and address barriers to recruitment, for example, community perceptions of museums

- Define the roles and responsibilities that you are seeking to recruit people for. What is the expertise that you need? Will everyone's role be the same in the community group? Be clear about what the tasks, time and remuneration requirements are for the role(s) and pull these together into a formal role description. Always check your participants want to undertake the role and tasks you've asked for before you start

- Make time to regularly discuss participants' involvement with them and ensure they are satisfied with their role and experience, reviewing this where required

- Produce a simple communications plan with your group from the start. How will you communicate in terms of how often and when (day, night or weekends)?

- Consider how you will implement a formal consent process that covers areas such as GDPR compliance with contact data, preferences, photo permissions, communication agreements and a clear understanding of evaluation

- Agree best and backup methods of communication (1:1s, emails, WhatsApp groups, phone calls, group meetings, review meetings and include a main contact at both ends).

Bespoke recruitment examples

National Museum of the Royal Navy, Glasgow Museums, Edinburgh Museums and Galleries and Museum of the Home all worked with established community groups they had an existing relationship with.

For their recruitment, SS Great Britain began a new relationship with the Hannah More Primary School. Three parent community researchers were recruited to undertake the research and to liaise with the school's parent-led 'Bridging the Gaps' community group.

By contrast, Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums and David Livingstone Birthplace Museum (DLBM) chose to have open calls and to recruit more diverse community groups through informal interviews. For example, because existing community groups they had a past relationship with were unavailable, DLBM developed a call with the West of Scotland Regional Equalities Council (WSREC), to maximise the levels of inclusivity and to outline the benefits to their intended audience. They circulated the proposal through their network of charity contacts including WSREC, the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, Empowering Women for Change and the Scotland Malawi Partnership as well as dissolved or currently inactive community groups including the Association of Malawians in Scotland and the Scotland Zambia Project.

In addition, some museums specifically recruited consultants or community 'gatekeepers' to help facilitate relationships with community groups and to steer project development. Museum of the Home recruited artist Rahemur Rahman who had already been working for 18 months with their community participants, the Brady Arts Community Group. Rahemur helped organise meetings, for example, a weekly 'Saturday club' with seven young British Bangladeshi Muslim artists, sharing his experience of how to interview family members, with the aim of seeking honest narratives and a safe space for the women in their lives. Rahemur's experience and training was crucial because most family members were telling their stories of heritage, identity and memories of the partition of Bengal for the first time.

'As a museum, when we were first participating in this project, we looked at our different partners and established community groups we had worked with in the past who would be interested in this project but a lot of them had disbanded or they had reduced a lot of their activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although this initially presented a challenge, it soon became clear, this is, in fact, quite a unique opportunity for us to create a new community group.'

Museum participant, DLBM

Launch event at SS Great Britain © National Museums Scotland

9 Needs analysis

Community participants may choose to participate in museum projects for a variety of reasons. Many Exchange community participants were motivated primarily by the possibility of decolonising museums and enhancing public discourse through the themes of empire, migration and life in Britain to reframe challenging narratives in a positive way. However, other community participants highlighted that they were drawn to the project principally for personal career or skills development interests related to the cultural sector and not only by the opportunity to share their expertise or work on a shared community 'interest' topic or collections research area. Needs analysis is thus key here to ensure that everyone is benefitting from the project on their own terms, rather than museums simply assuming that project benefits are shared equally by participants. This need not just be about formal training but can also be about developmental areas such as confidence building through role delegation. This aspect also aligns with 'Creating safe spaces' (recommendation above).

To achieve this, you might want to:

- Undertake a needs analysis at the start and build in training, skills development and support throughout

- Identify opportunities for non-formal skills and confidence development, for example, chairing meetings

- Create pathways to paid positions over remunerated tasks

- Provide opportunities to discuss CV, job applications or interviews and to apply skills, knowledge or experience learned in your project.

- Facilitate research visits to other museums or to meet other colleagues or arrange free tickets to visit different venues to support networking and wider engagement with the sector

- Identify what support may be required at group and individual level to ensure there is a supportive and safe environment in place.

Confidence and careers example

Community participants came from many walks of life. For example, some were in higher education while others had retired, some were employed and participated around their jobs while others had time to take part because they were unemployed. For some of those who were at university or who were unemployed, participation in Exchange was explicitly expressed in terms of confidence-building.

Workshop at Museum of the Home
© National Museums Scotland

For example, referring to a book that she published as an output of her research, a community participant at SS Great Britain told us:

'What I found really exciting is…that when I done the project and I said I was going to write a book. I didn't have no confidence in it, even though I was close to being told, 'Nobody's done this before. You're the first person to do it. It's amazing'…I think it took me a whole day to reflect on what I've done since January up to this point. I've actually come to the realisation now that actually I've written a really good book…it's starting to sink in now that I've done something really, really good. When I speak to people about it, the excitement, and just the looks on their faces shows me that I've done something good for our community and I'm just ecstatic about it coming out and being put in schools, and just for people in the community to be able to read it. …The project has been literally a life changer for me. I've been able to do things I didn't think that I would be able to do.'

While a community participant at Glasgow Museums, when referring to the artwork that she produced as an outcome of her research, told us:

'Seeing people pick up my work and wanting to keep it with them…it has sparked a fire in me… There's a lot of self-doubt with being a person of colour and an artist in Scotland, so this was life changing.'

05 Reflections

Launch event at SS Great Britain
© National Museums Scotland

Reflections

As highlighted in this report, there are many positives to community-led participatory practice, both for museums and community members. However, this report has also highlighted the many challenges, barriers and contradictions that may prevent or hinder participation.

Exchange has focused on what more equitable participation might involve for diaspora heritage community members. It is not a surprise that one of the key barriers to participation expressed by community participants was the issue of representation, in staffing, visitors, volunteers and displays. While not a surprise this is a crucial observation at a time when museums need lived experience to diversify staffing, visitors, volunteers

and displays through participatory practice. This is core work for museums and it could be argued that museums need diaspora heritage community members more than community members need museums. In this context, to avoid continuing extractive practices, it is essential that museums don't just try to achieve equality but instead seek equity for community participants by valuing and empowering them as experts, paying them for their time, creating safer spaces, providing time and flexibility, assessing and addressing their needs and co-designing participation so they can tell their stories on their terms.

To paraphrase one of the Exchange community participants, it's about having a genuine 'seat at the table'.

Acknowledgements

Cover image: Archive research workshop at Museum of the Home © National Museums Scotland

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