



Sustaining Engagement with Collections

The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund awarded a special type of grant as a response to changing needs in museums due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These were Sustaining Engagement with Collections grants of up to £30k to be spent within a year of award. Imagined as quick turnaround, innovative interventions to support engagement with collections at a time when physical and traditional access wasn't possible, the call for applications was heavily oversubscribed. We made £350k available in grants and received 145 applications totalling over £3.5m. With support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to divert more funding to these types of grant, we have awarded 23 projects totalling £550,730.

Grants awarded:

Amgueddfa Cymru: £30,000 for The Covid-19 Questionnaire – revisiting collecting methods of the past. To revisit 800 original, completed questionnaires and others spanning 1930s-80s capturing details of life in 20th century Wales, and to undertake Wales-wide engagement activities to develop a new way of working with communities post Covid-19.

Barnsley Museum Service: £17,250 for Draw Hope – promoting wellbeing for young people through the act of drawing. To engage young people, building skills and confidence and to bring their voices into new interpretation of the Sadler Collection of English Drawings (comprises 85 works and a range of delivery partners).

Birmingham Museums Trust: £30,000 for MuseumStream: a new hybrid outreach programme combining digital resources, live streaming and real objects. To pilot a new combination of physical and digital co-produced collections engagement for school and community audiences in a new loan box programme, MuseumStream.

Cornwall Museums Partnership: £26,300 for New Ways of Navigating Audio Archives Through Voice User Interfaces. To explore how museums can use AI with sound archives to tackle the consequences of isolation in the communities they serve, and to help them understand what users want from them.

Creswell Heritage Trust: £25,086 for Virtual Creswell Crags: reuniting the caves, collections, prehistoric art and medieval witch marks. To create digital resources through 3D scanning of cave interiors and key artefacts found in them using the

latest digital technology in order to reach new audiences, provide future resilience and increase the collections offer to existing audiences post Covid-19.

Foundling Museum: £27,900 for Shared Stories: Shared Voices, engaging audiences at the heart of the Foundling Museum's story. To engage former Foundling Hospital pupils; graduates of their care-leaver training programme; and volunteers and use new digital channels to share their stories and voices about collection objects they've chosen.

Glasgow Museums: £10,021 for Museum on your doorstep: an outreach response to Covid-19. To produce non-internet-based resources for different groups at risk of loneliness and isolation to be distributed via community partners, e.g. print media and filmed reminiscence sessions.

Gunnersbury Park Museum: £26,961 for Shooting Stars: Behind the Scenes at Ealing Studios. To undertake remote intergenerational volunteering work to digitise and interpret the collection in order to build skills, tackle loneliness and isolation and share the collection widely online and with an outdoor exhibition in Gunnersbury Park.

High Life Highland: £29,000 for Folk and Fabric at the Museum: through digital creation engage existing and new communities with unseen collections at the Highland Folk Museum. To engage existing and new communities using a web platform with digitised collections content and developing an Instagram filter enabling historic dressing up using 3D modelling of costume and accessory collections.

Imperial War Museums: £30,000 for Connecting, sharing, learning: sustaining relationships between collections and older communities. A pilot programme to enable War and Conflict SSN organisations to trial new methods of digital collection-based engagement with older communities – 70+, both living at home and those in residential care – through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jewish Museum London: £28,000 for The Object Lending Library: An Accessible Collection. To pilot a temporary loans programme to people's homes and community spaces, in particular to support an event or occasion using objects

relevant to modern audiences such as women's history, black history, migration, interfaith and LGBTQ+ rights.

Leeds City Art Gallery: £29,835 for 'Commoning' the Collection: testing models for building communities and sharing collection resources digitally at a time of social distancing. Activities include Wiki activity based on women and BAME artists in the collection and restarting its picture lending library with a digital catalogue and loans to non-art community venues.

Manchester Museum: £24,300 for To Have and To Heal: towards a blended model of engaging with ancient Egypt collections in a physically distanced world. Using digital engagement to explore themes of colonialism, multiculturalism and bereavement with Third sector organisations offering vital support to people at risk of social isolation, schools and care homes.

Museum of the Home: £30,000 for Stay Home. To explore the new collection of lockdown experiences in the context of the wider Documenting Homes collection and develop capacity to collect, share and manage digital material.

Museums of the University of St Andrews: £29,345 for Online storytelling with university museum collections. To develop and implement a new tool for storytelling-based engagement with digitised collections and to make this available as open-source software to other museums.

Museums Worcestershire: £18,996 for Volunteers at Home - access not isolation! To explore safe and risk assessed ways for current volunteers that are isolated by the pandemic to continue to work with museum collections and then offer this experience to those that are permanently isolated.

National Videogame Museum: £29,167 for Virtual Life in Lockdown: The Animal Crossing Diaries. Engagement project around Animal Crossing, using existing collections and collecting contemporary player experiences during lockdown. To deliver an online collection to boost social and creative engagement during the pandemic and bring new knowledge on collecting intangible experiences.

Newman Brothers at the Coffin Works: £20,850 for Access through innovation: creating a digital museum guide at the Coffin Works. To develop a digital museum guide including collections images, research, and videos to help visitors navigate

their way around the museum as an alternative to the guided tour model not possible with social distancing.

Royal Museums Greenwich: £29,947 for All Aboard: Reconnecting and building resilience through collection exploration with isolated groups. To explore and demonstrate how museums could use collections to support isolated people post-Covid-19 by using their collections of 300+ travel journals with groups of vulnerable people experiencing isolation now.

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts: £30,000 for Virtual Study Centre for Art and the Environment. To create a virtual study space sharing collections information for self-led or facilitated learning, based on sculpture collections relating to the environment.

Sir John Soane's Museum: £25,105 for Union of the Arts: An immersive digital experience of Sir John Soane's famous Picture Room. To produce a 3D digital recreation of the Picture Room, allowing users to digitally explore the collection, learn and experience the unique space and discover additional collections content.

Thackray Museum of Medicine: £23,414 for Open Wide – Kick-starting a new digital learning programme. To develop a digital collections-based learning programme in response to the rapidly changing needs of schools post-Covid. Piloted with Prince Albert's medicine chest, its contents and associated materials, which provide a unique angle on stories of colonialism and social privilege at home and abroad.

Towner Eastbourne: £12,405 for Towner's podcast series cocreated with Eastbourne's LGBTQ+ community. Using collection works as a starting point for exploration and conversation and inviting responses to artworks; aiming to widen engagement and understanding of the collection, strengthen communication within and between communities and grow diverse audiences.

True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum: £3,900 for Great Change – The last Generation. To draw out connections between the experience of slum clearance and relocation in the North End of Kings Lynn (1930-1970) with the turbulence of the lockdown period and sense of permanent change, through an oral history project, related digital content and a touring exhibition.

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums: £29,000 for Mini Must-see....: A project to test the emerging digital programme Must-see Stories. A pilot to create a new digital destination for audiences to immerse themselves in compelling stories, through media such as film, audio, photography, creative writing and narrative journalism.

Wisbech & Fenland Museum: £19,000 for New conversations. To complete the museum's first digital audience research project, scoping and testing new ideas in a range of media to create a digital collections strategy.