



MDUK and Art Fund 2020-21 Recovery Grants Final evaluation report June 2021

Introduction

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, Museum Development UK (MDUK) and The Art Fund worked in partnership to distribute recovery funding to museums across the UK. Recovery Grants were administered by the UK-wide Museum Development providers comprising; Museum Development England (partnership of nine English regional MD programmes, funded by Arts Council England); Museums Galleries Scotland; the Welsh Federation of Museums and Arts Galleries (on behalf of the Welsh government); and Northern Ireland Museums Council.

The priority for grants was to support the recovery phase of small to medium sized museums that had not received emergency funding from national bodies such as Arts Council England or National Lottery Heritage Fund. These museums are often located in areas of low cultural engagement; the main cultural offer in a locality; or based in urban areas with niche collections and specific cultural offers outside large city institutions.

Recovery Grants were awarded at the discretion of Museum Development providers based on urgency of need, project description and research, understanding of audience needs, track record of managing funds, value for money, evidence of strategic planning, organisational sustainability, and impact on communities.

The investment programme supported organisational resilience and helped museums to re-open safely and effectively, to meet audience needs and expectations and to develop a sustainable offer for the future. The funding programme ran from July 2020 with grants allocated by December 2020.

The quantitative report was delivered in February 2021 which captured the number, range and geographic reach of the investment. The report is available on the [MDUK website](#).

This is the final (qualitative) evaluation report which reveals the early impact and outcomes of the Recovery Grants.

This report is based on 83 evaluation survey responses from museums across England, Wales and Northern Ireland*¹. The table at the end of the report provides a list of the responses. It is noted that the grant funded projects of several museums were delayed due to museum closures caused by

¹ Museums Galleries Scotland provided evaluation of impact directly to the Art Fund.

the third national Covid-19 lockdown. MDUK partners continue to support these organisations and monitor these projects.

Figures at a glance

The tables below show the total amount of recovery funding available including Art Fund contribution and match funding from each MD provider:

Country	Art Fund contribution	Match grant funding from MD provider	Total recovery funding available
England	£196,560	£242,578	£439,038
Scotland	£62,720	£2,066	£64,786
Northern Ireland	£5,880	£5,313	£11,193
Wales	£14,840	£2,523	£17,363
total	£280,000	£252,360	£532,380

In England, the funding is broken down by region as follows:

Region	AF contribution	Match funding from regional MD provider	Total recovery funds awarded
London	£19,656	£3,544	£23,200
East of England	£23,587	£10,726	£34,313
North East	£9,828	£24,691	£34,519
South West	£33,415	£45,320	£78,735
West Midlands	£17,690	£26,524	£44,214
North West	£19,656	*£51,317	£70,973
South East	£37,346	£30,944	£68,290
East Midlands	£17,690	£32,102	£49,792
Yorkshire	£17,692	£17,310	£35,002
total	196,560	£242,478	£439,038

*Includes £10,000 contribution from Curious Minds, NW bridge organisation.

Outcomes and Impacts

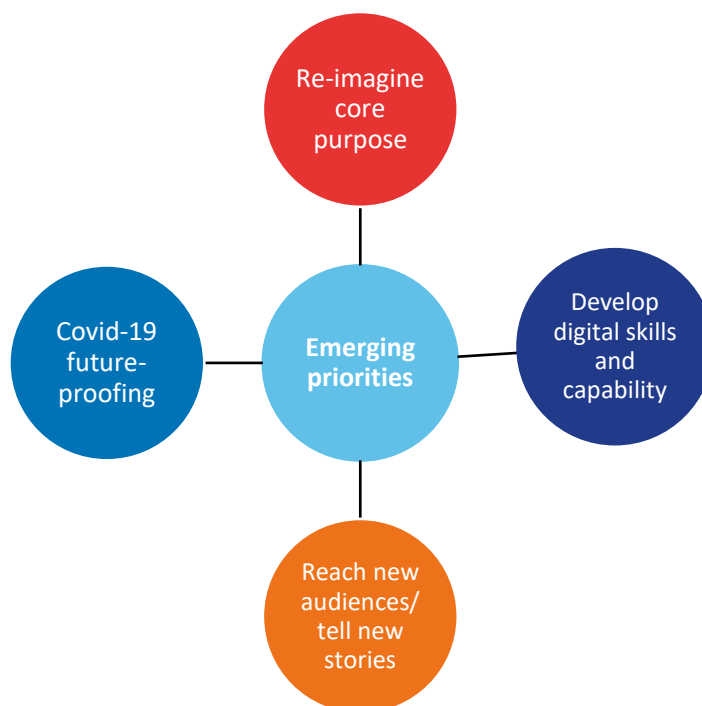
In addition to ensuring that MDUK supported a wide range of organisations (in size, governance type and geographic location), in turn serving a wider range of communities across the UK, we identified four outcomes that we aimed to achieve through the investment programme:

1. MDUK and the Art Fund understand the emerging priorities of museums during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Through investment, the museums have achieved outcomes they would not have otherwise been able to.
3. Recovery Grants have had a positive and significant impact on the museums during the pandemic.
4. Museums are more resilient as a result of MDUK and Art Fund investment.

Recovery Grant recipients were issued with an e-survey in April / May 2021. They were asked to describe the priorities that emerged at their museums during the pandemic; to reflect on the

difference the grant made to their museum; what they achieved with the investment; and what they learned through the process. Their responses are analysed against the four outcomes in this report.

Outcome 1 - MDUK and the Art Fund understand the emerging priorities of museums during the Covid-19 pandemic.



There is clear evidence among respondents that museums are revisiting their **core purpose**, vision and values during the pandemic. The pandemic, with all its challenges and uncertainties around national and local lockdowns, has been a watershed moment for museum leaders to refocus efforts on what the museums is for, how it is perceived by the public, and how to bring about a shift in organisational culture focused on local need and community values.

New business models are being investigated, with renewed interest in blended learning, a flexible approach to home working and interrogation of new charging models. Many museums report how attracting **new audiences** during lockdown (e.g. online) audiences, local families in the brief periods where re-opening was possible in late summer / early autumn 2020) has focused their thinking and planning for the future. Others report how their programming and online response was developed to target families, teachers and pupils while home-schooling or people shielding and living in care homes – thereby responding directly to challenges presented by the pandemic and supporting people disproportionately affected by lockdown. There is a clear shift in focus on the wellbeing, health and safety of the workforce, including volunteers.

Redoubling efforts to remain visible during lockdown and forced closures saw museums testing, experimenting and piloting content that is educational but also ‘accessible, fun and entertaining’. The creation of virtual programmes for online visitors became the primary objective of the majority of services as well as working with communities to co-create content. Many museums report how

they are actively collecting new stories (related to the pandemic and experiences of lockdown) and introducing new voices to the narrative.

Inevitably, the public demand for digital content, coupled with the sector's own desire to create engaging and accessible collections-related information, exasperated pre-pandemic weaknesses and exposed gaps in terms of **digital capability**, skills, and technology. Remote access to systems or systems that lacked integration needed urgent attention to enable teams to work more efficiently (as well as remotely).

Contactless and cashless systems, improving visitor routes (to accommodate social distancing), online booking / donations systems and retail platforms were all needed as part of plans to reopen and **future-proof** museums.

Lastly, improving facilities and wrap-around services required an urgent rethink to **reopen** and restore confidence of staff, volunteers and reassure visitors on their return to site. Balancing new visitor routes and enhanced cleaning regimes with collection care, access and conservation needs was key to achieving this.

The table below provides a summary of emerging priorities among respondents:

Re-imagining the museum's core purpose	New audiences, new stories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on profile and perception of the museum • Shifting ethos of the leadership / governance • Building a stronger brand • Develop a blended offer between free and charged for opportunities. • Diversifying the delivery model and reviewing business plan • Virtual programming and new partnerships • Flexible approach to home-working, training and talent development • Focus on staff and volunteer wellbeing, health and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging new audiences with digital offer • Prioritising community. Local and younger audiences (now that they cannot rely so heavily on tourists and older visitors) • Make an accessible, fun, entertaining and informative content • Working with communities to enable people to share their stories about C19 (collecting new content for the collection) • Increase in community engagement, diversification of collections by gathering contemporary stories • Supporting those hit hardest by pandemic – care home residents, home-schoolers, socially isolated / shielding • Establish new relationships with under-represented communities.
Digital skills and capabilities	Covid-19 future-proofing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing interactives with digital to make covid-safe • Monetising digital content • New, more accessible websites with increased content • Improving digital infrastructure to increase access to collections • Training to address digital literacy skills gap • Virtual programming and new partnerships • On-line booking, donation, and retail systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing collections care with ventilation • Revisiting visitor flow / route and social distancing • Prioritising health and safety of visitors, staff and volunteers above all else • Striking a balance between remote / blended learning and events programming • Contactless / cashless systems.

Outcome 2 - Through investment, the museums have achieved outcomes they would not have otherwise been able to.

It is clear across all museum respondents that the Recovery Grants made a significant difference during the pandemic and the forced closure of the sector. Museums were able to achieve tangible and significant outcomes that would have been challenging under other circumstances.

The grant funding allowed for a **flexible approach to working** including the facilitation of homeworking and the ability to monitor buildings and collections remotely. It gave museums the breathing space required to plan for a new future.

The grants gave museums **increased capacity** for events, skills development, learning through adaptation and formal training. Capacity was also increased through the commissioning of external experts to support business modelling / planning, audience development research and stakeholder engagement. Some museums also benefited from additional support to create new marketing and promotional material. Utilising the grant to bring staff back from furlough was of huge benefit to museums to alleviate capacity restrictions. There were also key opportunities to commission artists to engage with communities and inspire creativity during lockdowns. The grants thereby supported the wider museum sector workforce (Freelancers, creative practitioners).

The funding was fundamental to implementing government guidance in reopening plans. Many museums used their grant to risk assess and address the **health and safety** of staff, volunteers and visitors. This was achieved through the purchase of screens, automatic doors, contactless payment systems, signage for improved visitor routes including social distancing, and PPE. It also helped museums to establish enhanced cleaning regimes, reconfiguring spaces, and develop new introductory films and Covid-19 safe tours to give confidence to staff and volunteers returning to sites.

The grants enabled a swift **response to public need** during the pandemic. This included adapting to support schools and home-schooling through the development of new loans boxes, touring museum experiences, creation of replicas for handling, online offer for schools, outdoor trails, and virtual education workshops.

Fundamentally, the grants allowed **procurement** where budgets were frozen and there was no income being generated due to closure. Procurement covered everything from new websites, to PPE, screens, signage and training.

The grants meant that museums could be fleet of foot in implementing improvements to **digital infrastructure**, with all associated systems and training for staff to improve digital literacy put in place. Purchasing equipment (hardware and software), commissioning film, creating new online content, podcasts, developing digital strategies, integrating systems and building new websites with improved capabilities were some of the tangible outcomes that completely transformed how museums were able to grow their engagement with audiences during the pandemic.

Additionally, the development of online shop, ticketing, donation and membership systems supported this new venture into the digital realm, whilst also enabling museums to plan for visitors returning to site and deliver on-going **income generation** activity while the site was closed during lockdowns.

To safeguard heritage and collections through appropriate **care and security of collections** under lockdown, there was investment in CCTV and remote security systems (where physical access was difficult / prohibited), audits of policy and procedures for future lockdowns, and environmental controls with remote access. Collection care-related kit procured by the grants included dehumidifiers, storage heaters, and ventilation systems.

Some museums focused their grant spend on collections development. This included working with communities to uncover new stories and introduce new voices into the museum's narrative, the ongoing digitisation of collections to render them accessible online, the development of online exhibitions, tours, films, zoom webinars, and podcasts.

Looking to the future, some museums took to recording the experiences of audiences in lockdown for future generations, and creating plans to pilot and test new ways of working to improve collection care in lockdown.

Outcome 3 - Recovery Grants have had a positive and significant impact on the museums during the pandemic.

Evaluation survey respondents report a range of objectives achieved through their Recovery Grant projects and the impact that the investment had on their museums. Some of the feedback includes:

“We’ve learned how families want to engage with us.”

“Reopening is now commercially viable.”

“We have standardised our data capture and embedded evaluation to stay on top of visitor needs, priorities, concerns.”

“We’re more focused on the health and wellbeing of staff.”

“On-line sales are up and we’ve got new revenue streams.”

“Objects are better cared for and the site is more secure (when unstaffed).”

“We’re sharing what we’ve learned with other museums.”

“Cross-departmental working transformed as a result of the project which united people to common cause.”

“The building is Covid safe and has improved air circulation.”

“The relationship with schools has developed and teachers report that the service’s adaption is of good quality and is responsive to their needs.”

“Improvements to systems means that we are working ‘smarter’ and more efficiently.”

It is noted that the window between receiving the grant funding and completing the evaluation form was just six months and this period was punctuated by the third lockdown (December 2020– end of March 2021). In that timeframe and under these unprecedented circumstances, grant giving bodies would not expect to see long term outcomes or impacts achieved in full. However, it is worth noting that where museums were asked to reflect on *outcomes*, they reported primarily on *outputs* (or deliverables). Although it is clear from the evaluation that a minority of museums are starting to use evaluation to develop their practice, going forward, MD providers should support museums to become more outcome-focused.

On the whole, there is evidence that the Recovery Grant investment has benefitted a range of different areas of museum service delivery as follows:



Meeting short-term objectives (December 2020 to April 2021)

47 survey respondents report that they had met all objectives. Unsurprisingly, 33 museums claimed they had yet to meet their objectives due to ongoing restrictions caused by the pandemic and the third lockdown. Other reasons for not having yet met objectives include:

- Not open to the public
- Haven't yet tested with visitors
- Too soon to say
- Limited by number of participants
- Covid-19 restrictions
- Brexit & procurement
- Building work delays
- Delays in ordering
- Government regulations
- Evaluation is ongoing
- Schools were closed
- Staff furloughed or redeployed to another department
- Developing partnerships from scratch and remotely is challenging.

Outcome 4 - Museums are more resilient as a result of MDUK and Art Fund investment.

MDUK set out four 'success measures' to gauge museum resilience brought about by Recovery Grant investment:



Museums learned through the process.

It is clear from the evaluation surveys that museums (individuals and organisations) gained insight, practical skills and increased their knowledge through the process – regardless of the size of grant received.

“A modest additional resource, targeted appropriately, can yield significant results far greater than imagined, with longer-term effect, and can provide a new energy to a well-established organisation.”

Many museums report that they now recognise the need to be fleet of foot with new technologies and the importance of investing (time and resource) to both develop and maintain digital skills. Across the board, there is an increased awareness of the importance of investing in upskilling the workforce to achieve a range of successes – from organisational capability to staff cohesion, retention and job satisfaction.

With museums closed during the pandemic, many have learned that digital is not a ‘quick win’ or something that takes place on the periphery of the service. Digital success requires resource, skills, time, devoted staff and is central to the business model. Linked to this, there is wide acknowledgment that museum websites are more than just a ‘shopfront,’ but a valuable pre-visit and post-visit tool. Many museums report how they are using website statistics, together with the data collected on site, to inform decision-making. Others are developing stronger online programmes to compliment on-site programming.

There is clear evidence that Recovery Grants – coupled with the challenges of Covid-19 - brought about a shift in how museums manage data (collecting it, analysing it, using it) and evaluate. During lockdown and with grant investment, museums were able to experiment with new communication tools and as a result learned the importance of testing, refining and evaluation to see what works with audiences. The grants, coupled with forced building closures, gave museums the space to

rethink how they engage with audiences and to track and monitor the success of different approaches. Museums report that they learned to adopt a 'more flexible, and reflective organisational culture' where trial, pilot, test and experimentation is recognised as a valuable approach to service delivery.

The Recovery Grants also brought about a shift in people management and organisational culture. Many respondents report that interrogating the identity and brand of the museum brought a renewed emphasis on putting people first. Beyond fresh assessment and understanding of visitors needs and motivations, organisations focused internally on the health and wellbeing of the workforce (paid staff and volunteers).

“The safety and security of staff, volunteers and visitors is paramount. They need to feel safe as well as being safe.”

“When staff are well equipped, resourced and appreciated they are motivated to achieve and flourish. Nurturing talent, creativity and having a can-do attitude is key to success.”

The benefit of collaborating with teachers, schools, consultants, artists and other freelancers and working with external partners helped grant recipients begin to interrogate how culture and heritage could be reprioritised on the high streets and in towns and cities to meet the changing habits of customers.

There is also clear evidence from survey responses that the grants and experience of the pandemic expanded thinking around cross-departmental working, coproduction (working with communities to develop and deliver programmes), rethinking gallery spaces, programmes and adopting a 'fresh approach to service delivery'.

Grant brought benefit to museums during Covid-19

The Recovery Grants brought significant benefit to the museums in addition to the tangible objectives described in grant applications. This is due, not least because the grants landed during expenditure freezes making business continuity feasible, but because the grants allowed museums to do new things and do them differently (as mentioned above).

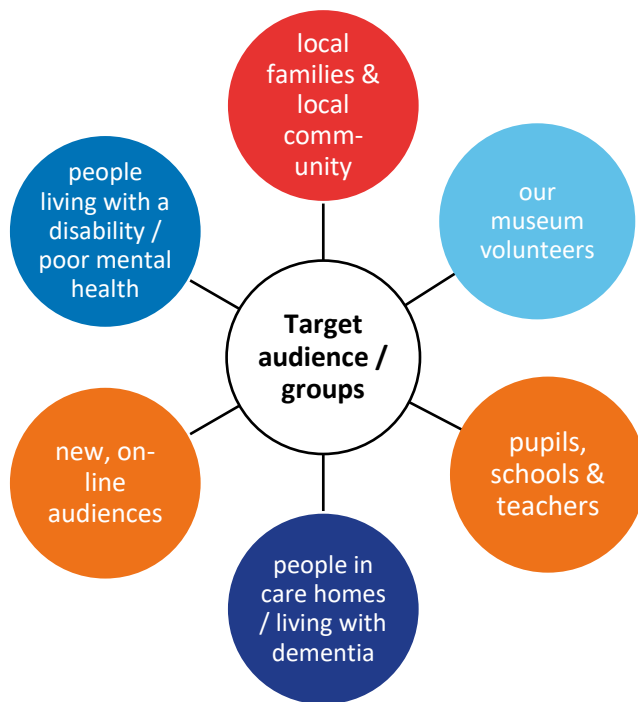
Other (non-tangible) benefits of the grants recorded by survey respondents include:

- It unified the team
- Made reopening a feasible and profitable exercise
- Gave us the headspace to reflect and develop new ideas
- Increased our ability to advocate for our service
- Enabled us to become more ambitious
- Gave us new tools and facilities
- It facilitated home working.

Audiences and communities benefited and engaged with the project.

25 museum respondents reported that the Recovery Grants did not directly support the local community (it was more targeted at infrastructure improvements) and 34 responded that although the grant supported audiences – it was through general audience development, for an unspecified group or multiple / untargeted audience groups. Many in the latter group listed 'online audiences' as the key beneficiary of the project.

Of the 24 remaining museums who completed the evaluation survey, the following specific audience groups were listed as main beneficiaries of investment:



Museums are self-reflective; they evaluate progress and achievements.

There is clear evidence across respondents that museums are putting processes in place to assess progress and measure their success. From gaining a more comprehensive understanding of museum buildings and environmental controls - to working with staff to influence organisational and cultural shifts - many acknowledge that embedding evaluation into all aspects of service delivery will be key to the ongoing recovery from the pandemic.

Museums are measuring how they achieve their objectives through a range of activity, including:

Quantitative data including:	Qualitative evaluation such as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor numbers / repeat visits • Website statistics • Social media followers • Museum enquiries • Press and publicity • Numbers at special events (including online events) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction levels • Trip adviser comments • Google analytics • Exit surveys / questionnaires • Teacher feedback • Evaluation forms

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticket sales / admissions • School visits • Group visits • Loan boxes borrowed (numbers and frequency). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting SMART objectives with baseline data • Monitoring KPIs • Visitors feedback / comments books • Commissioning external evaluation.
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Evaluation survey responses

Nation*	Number of museums that received a grant	Number of museums that completed evaluation
England	101	68
Wales	18	6
Northern Ireland	12	9
	total	83

*Scotland have reported impact of their grants directly to the Art Fund.

English region	Number of museums that received a grant	Number of museums who completed evaluation
East Midlands	7	6
East of England	15	6
London	5	4
North East	4	3
North West	12	9
South East	19	14
South West	23	20
West Midlands	11	4
Yorkshire	5	2



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