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What we've learnt about museums working with artists

Increasingly, museums are working with artists. It can be a rewarding and creative experience for all involved: the artist, the museum and the public. There are several ways that museums can work with artists from artists in residence or commissioned work based on a collection, to artist-run workshops or selling an artist's work through the shop or an exhibition.

At the Museum Consultancy we've helped museums work with artists and other creative practitioners. This sheet summarises what we've learnt.

Working with artists can help a museum to

- **Increase the use of the collection** Artists can bring fresh perspectives to collections, including things that may previously have been stored or underused
- **Reach new audiences** New interpretations of collections and more visually striking displays can appeal to different audiences
- **Raise profile** Working with artists can be novel and eye-catching, often creating a bit of a buzz and generating new interest in what you do
- **Increase the use of museum expertise and build new expertise** Collaborations with artists can bring the museum's specialist knowledge to a wider audience. Artist collaborations can also generate new knowledge and skills in the organisation
- **Generate income** Not all projects with artists will be geared towards income generation, but there is potential here, for example through commission on sales of work, or through the development of merchandise to sell in the shop and possibly elsewhere. Grants may be available for artistically ambitious collaborations

Likewise we've found plenty of reasons why artists want to work with museums, including

- **Stimulus and inspiration** from museum collections, working in a new environment and the opportunity to explore behind the scenes and see collections not currently on display
- **Increased exposure** for their work and an opportunity to reach new, broader audiences
- **Sales** of work as a result of exposure through partnership with a museum
- **Funding** from sources supporting art in new settings or new ways of working for museums
- **Giving support** to a trusted and loved organisation
- **Further involvement** in the museum such as volunteering or becoming a board member

Working together can clearly be beneficial for artists and museums, but a word of warning. We've learnt it's not always for the faint hearted as it often requires museums to work in a much more flexible way than they are used to, and for artists to accept unfamiliar restrictions. There are things it's important to think about before getting started.

Museums considering working with an artist should answer these questions:

- **Why are you doing it? What do you want to get out of it?** You need to be able to justify the staff time and resources. Be clear about why the museum wants to work with artists, the intended outcomes and how it fits with the museum's overall strategic priorities
- **What is the best timescale?** Museums and artists may have very different ideas of timescales. We've found artists can be very enthusiastic, wanting to act at short notice, but museums tend to plan things long in advance, which can make them appear unresponsive
- **How will you ensure access to collections?** The main point of working with artists is often to get the collection used in new ways, and a key draw for the artist is getting access to the collection. So, think about how you will provide access to objects and try not to make it onerous for you or the artist
- **Who is the audience?** Who you want to reach might influence which artist you choose, how you choose to work with them and the collections they use
- **Are you really up for it?** A key reason to work with artists is to get new, often unexpected, perspectives on the museum and its collection. To get the most out of it, museums need to be flexible, open to new ways of working, willing to take a risk - and willing to potentially fail

Defining the relationship the museum will have with the artist is important as it will influence how they work together. Will the relationship be an equal collaboration, or will the museum be commissioning and paying the artist to do work that the museum specifies? It's important to agree certain key things at the beginning so everyone knows where they stand. These include:

Deliverables: What will be produced, what services will be delivered

Timetable: Key dates and deadlines

Money: Financial arrangements

Roles: Who is responsible for what

Ownership: Who will own anything produced physically

Rights: Who will own copyright and other intellectual property rights

Exclusivity: Whether either party is giving the other exclusive rights to anything

Credits and Branding: How things produced will be credited and branded

Approvals: Who will need to approve (and so have the right to reject) anything produced

Restrictions: on what can be done or when and where things can be done

Termination: can the agreement be ended early and if so what does that mean for the financial arrangements

For more advice about working with artists, and other creative individuals and organisations, visit the Northern Ireland Museums Council Toolkit for Museums and the Creative Industries, which the Museum Consultancy researched and wrote <http://www.nimc.co.uk/what-we-do/guidance-and-information/museum-and-creative-industries-toolkit>

For more information sheets, and to find out more about the work of the Museum Consultancy go to: www.museumconsultancy.co.uk or get in touch at E: contact@museumconsultancy.co.uk T: 07540 625 142

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