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## What we've learnt about leadership in smaller museums

**In small organisations, leadership is particularly about helping people work effectively together, and drawing on the diverse skills of everyone in the museum.**

**At the Museum Consultancy, we've helped many smaller museums strengthen their leadership. This sheet summarises some approaches that we've seen working.**

### **Establish shared priorities and values**

You probably have an organisational vision or mission statement, but does it shape the organisation on a day-to-day basis? Is it genuinely shared by all your staff? This is even more important in a small museum, where every member of the team makes a big difference to the organisational culture. It's good to have

- **A shared sense of purpose** why the museum exists and the difference it wants to make
- **Common priorities** the most important things the museum is trying to achieve
- **Shared values** the things the museum believes in. These will include public service, access for all, honesty and integrity. And there are likely to be others, too

We recently worked with an organisation that had realised that their vision and values were simply not reflected in the everyday encounters which visitors had with staff. We helped plan a programme of events to help everyone working for the museum think through how they contributed to the organisation's purpose and values, and how they could convey this to visitors. This included

- **Team awaydays** to visit a museum that did a better job of living its values
- **Examining every interaction** with visitors to see how each interaction could be enhanced and used to communicate vision and values (sometimes called 'touchpoint mapping')
- **Including all staff** in development activities, by running 'twilight' sessions after the museum closed (paying people overtime if necessary) and doing the awayday visit twice

### **Breakdown silos with real projects, not just good intentions**

In some organisations staff identify too closely with their small departments. They don't properly share ideas or information, leading to duplication of effort, missed opportunities and poor service. In our experience, building trust and building relationships takes time and the best way to break down these silos is for people to join together to deliver projects. Maybe plan an event or exhibition which will require people to work together in genuinely collaborative ways? After that people are much more likely to think of involving each other in future projects.

## **Just because you're small, doesn't mean everyone knows what's going on**

In small museums communication might seem easy: there are only a few members of staff, so everyone must chat all the time, surely? No; good communication has to be cultivated. Does everyone know what projects are in the pipeline? Does everyone hear about the key points from a meeting with a stakeholder or colleagues in other museums? Simple approaches include:

- A noticeboard by the kettle
- A morning walk-round
- Regular staff meetings – and see below for more on those

## **Improve your meetings**

There's no one right approach here, but take a good look at what meetings you hold – for projects and on a routine basis. Think about whether they work well. Are people energised by them or do people dread them? Do you? And also think about whether there are any members of staff who never sit round a table together. Would it be better if they did?

Here's a few things that can make regular meetings work better

- Change the chair. Giving everyone the chance to chair a regular meeting in rotation can stop the atmosphere becoming stultifying and inject novel perspectives
- Make sure everyone gets chance to speak within the first 5 minutes. If people are only listening there are more effective ways of them receiving information
- Think about who is invited – are there volunteers or junior staff who aren't there but who are vital to the work being discussed?

## **Front of house staff matter**

Front of house staff are a valuable resource. They're likely to know your visitors better than anyone, have insights into things that could be done better, and have untapped skills and knowledge. But museums don't always make the most of them. Here are some things we've seen in museums we've worked with recently

- Arrange for front of house staff to spend half a day a week on, for example, event planning, curatorial work or conservation cleaning. Other staff benefit from an extra pair of hands and from a fresh approach. Front of house staff experience greater job satisfaction and gain skills that enable them to talk more knowledgeably to visitors
- If that sounds like more than you can manage, back of house staff could go 'back to the floor' for a few hours a month – good for their experience and it will free up a little time for front of house staff to contribute their ideas and knowledge to other departments
- When a new role or activity comes up, instead of recruiting a freelancer, or someone on a temporary contract, consider whether one of the front of house team could do it
- Offer front of house staff training and development opportunities that aren't necessarily related to their current role but would be good for their knowledge and career progression

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

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