

COVID-19 IMPACT: MUSEUM SECTOR RESEARCH REPORT ON THE CHALLENGES FACING MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

The summary of recent research offers insight into how the pandemic has impacted museums and galleries, what museums need, and how Art Fund support can be adapted over the coming weeks and months.

We know that many of the UK's museums and galleries face an uncertain future due to the Covid-19 crisis. Following the temporary closures of cultural venues across the country in March this year, Art Fund commissioned research to find out how we and others could best support as many museums as possible through this period.

We asked cultural consultants Wafer Hadley to survey arts professionals about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on their work and organisations, what they needed in terms of funding and support, and how Art Fund could best help.

The resulting report draws together over 400 responses from two surveys – one for museum directors, one for museum professionals - 22 in-depth interviews, and two focus groups.

[Download the report here](#)

Four clear areas of focus emerged from the research:

- The future of collections and exhibition programming
- The agile and adaptable digital skills and infrastructure needed to open up collections and reach audiences online now and in future
- How to encourage visitors to return once museums reopen and the practical and financial challenges that accompany social distancing in museums
- How to support an expert and passionate workforce through a period of continued uncertainty

These findings will inform our funding response to the Covid-19 crisis. In June we'll be sharing information about our full programme of support, including grants to help immediate financial needs in these areas. In the meantime, we've kept existing funding programmes open to help museums and galleries access grants more quickly and easily than ever before.

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Other findings in the report include:

- The most pressing concern for almost all organisations is safe reopening and attracting audiences back, and the financial impact of opening with social distancing measures. 85% of directors are concerned about the ability to attract visitors back.
- Independent organisations and Trusts appear to be in the most immediate need of financial assistance; the impact to Local Authority run services, University museums and nationals is likely to be felt later. Overall more than half of staff are worried about the future of their organisations, but this is much higher in Independents (74%) and Local Authorities (61%)
- Digital opportunities are immense and the vast majority (86%) of organisations have increased their online presence; but digital resources and expertise are patchy, and many museums are left behind. Finding ways to generate income through online activities is an area of interest to many.
- There are gaps in the provision of training and development opportunities in the sector, particularly for a hub of information on existing resources. 68% of staff and 77% of directors were interested in support for free online training and skills development
- Although support for collections might not rise to the top of the list of concerns for museums and galleries at present, support for acquisitions, conservation, collections research and curatorial skills will be much needed in the near-future, particularly with a re-focusing on collections rather than toured-in shows.
- With 56% of directors worried about the viability of their organisations, there are likely to be collections at risk due to the severe financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis on many organisations
- Networks and providing a sense of belonging are more important than ever; 70% of staff would find funding for networks extremely helpful or helpful
- Organisations are focused on the immediate challenges, but in the longer-term new models and ways of working have to evolve
- In a changing funding landscape, it's important for funders to work together and co-ordinate their support to help create solutions that address the sector's needs
- Art Fund is perceived as well-placed to advocate for the sector as a whole

Art Fund's director of programmes and policy Sarah Philp says: *"The challenge faced by the museum sector cannot be overstated. We hope that the findings from our research will inform and support the work of many museum and arts sector organisations, agencies and funders. We are working quickly to adapt our own charitable programme and look forward to sharing more information on what else*

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we will be doing to support museums in June. We would like to thank the museum professionals who contributed to our research at an incredibly difficult time. And we are grateful to Art Fund's supporters; we are an independent charity and it is only through public generosity that we are able to listen and respond to the sector effectively. We now all need to come together to help museums adapt to meet the challenges they face."

Find out more about Art Fund's open [funding programmes](#) for museums, galleries and arts professionals and [free digital tools and resources](#) or please do [get in touch](#) with our team directly.

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Notes to Editors:

Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 159,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year, which was won by St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff, in 2019, and through a range of digital platforms.

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