

MINDSETS + MISSIONS

INSIGHTS REPORT FOR THE CULTURAL SECTOR

[JULY 2025]

THE
LIMINAL
SPACE



UK Research
and Innovation



Association for
Science and
Discovery Centres



Museums
Association

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INSIGHTS REPORT FOR THE CULTURAL SECTOR

Mindsets + Missions (M+M) was funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The programme ran from 2023-2024 and consisted of an initial learning programme for museum and science and discovery centre professionals, followed by a grants phase.



THE MIXED MUSEUM GROUP MEMBERS AT FRIENDS HOUSE JUNE 2024. PHOTO: SUE ALEXANDER



Twelve projects emerging from the collaborative learning programme received funding, each designed to dismantle barriers between research, innovation and society. These projects showcased how museums and science and discovery centres can engage underrepresented and often-marginalised groups, broadening inclusion and access to research and innovation.

Science and discovery centres and museums adopted co-production and participatory approaches, enabling participants to actively engage in the research process. Practitioners provided tools and supported the confidence needed for participants to use, question, contribute to, shape and benefit from research and innovation. They focused on understanding how to collaborate effectively with community groups and individuals, ensuring the research was not extractive but meaningful and impactful for both participants and researchers.

This report is for professionals working within museums, science and discovery centres and other civic and cultural public engagement spaces. It is a reference tool drawing from reporting by the [Museums Association \(MA\)](#), the [Association for Science and Discovery Centres \(ASDC\)](#) and [The Liminal Space \(LS\)](#), alongside individual project reports and the external final project evaluation, to enable practitioners to quickly source the rich learning and resources from M+M.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Rooted in lived experience and community expertise, collaborations reshaped what research and innovation looked like in a museum and discovery centre space. The series of projects within M+M were bold, inclusive, relevant and deeply personal. Key themes and approaches that emerged across multiple projects, included:

Diverse narratives, plural perspectives:

Projects embraced participatory practice, aiming to ensure everyone had a seat at the creative table and that tools, knowledge and spaces were shared. The projects flipped the script, not only on whose voices were heard, but on whose voices were integral to driving the research agenda and the decisions on the innovative outputs.

Creativity and collaboration:

Mixing creativity, science and technology, communities connected with research and innovation on their terms. Through methodologies such as story-telling, oral histories, art, design and development, science and discovery centres and museums became hubs for active, multidisciplinary exploration and two-way learning.

Relevance and representation:

Personal, cultural and civic relevance were central themes, connecting participants to meaningful and complex research. From local to global, projects often started from individual stories and interests, and expanded to explore wider community issues, or global challenges such as sustainability.

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> **Assets and resources**

- [Written case studies](#) from all M+M projects
- [Case study films](#) from Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales, Dynamic Earth, Kielder Observatory and The Mixed Museum

“I think it will change how we will work with underrepresented groups as it has changed how I think about research and innovation.”

M+M PROJECT GRANT HOLDER



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

M+M launched with a dynamic learning programme led by the creative consultancy The Liminal Space (LS), bringing together professionals from science and discovery centres, museums, community-based organisations, and changemakers. Designed to spark collaboration before project proposals were developed, the programme fostered the sharing of challenges, collective courage, and cross-pollination of ideas and partnerships. It began with an in-person event in Leeds, where participants connected, explored core themes, and articulated individual and shared goals. This was followed by a series of online sessions featuring guest speakers, including academic researchers, community advocates, creative changemakers, and international museum and science centre professionals, and workshops led by facilitators experienced in working with underrepresented audiences. An online collaboration space supported ongoing idea exchange and relationship building, while participants contributed to a living library of case studies and resources throughout the programme.

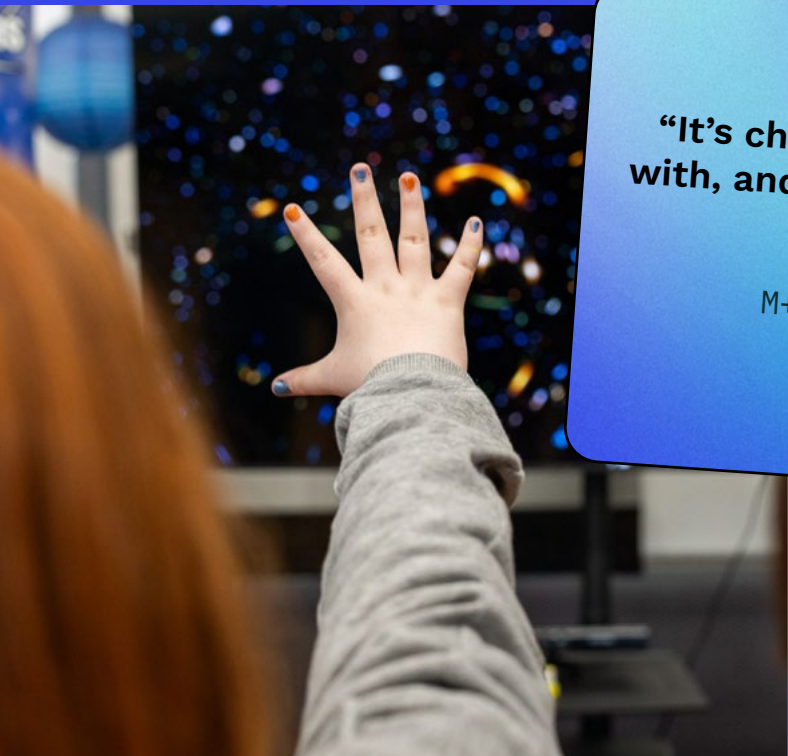
The partnership between the MA, ASDC and LS created an inclusive space where peers felt a strong sense of belonging, learned from each other’s experiences, and built confidence and skills through inspiring challenges. Participants left with a broader understanding of their sectors and where their work fits, practical examples of engagement, a diverse network of contacts, expanded resources, and a deeper grasp of the programme’s key themes, strengthening the sector through shared innovation and collective growth.

A summary capturing the curriculum, discussions and shared resources was created so the wider sector and interested parties could benefit from the learning programme beyond the live delivery, see the link below.

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> Assets and resources

- M+M [Learning programme insights report](#): key reflections and recommendations from the learning programme that shaped programme delivery (LS, 2023)



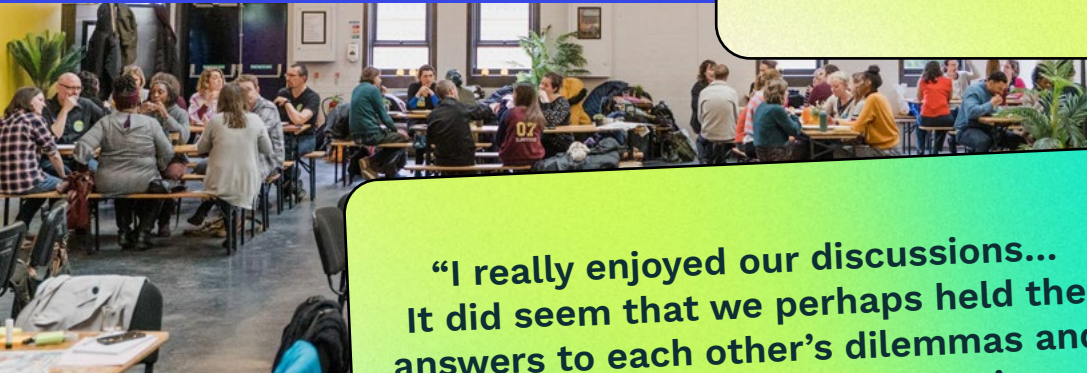
STREET COSMOS, EXPLORING SPACE AND ASTRONOMY RESEARCH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM.

“It’s changed how I look at creating with, and integrating with, our visitors and communities.”

M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME
COHORT MEMBER

“Science centres and museums are perfectly placed to be those bridging organisations between researchers and the public.”

M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME
COHORT MEMBER



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME.
PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

“I really enjoyed our discussions... It did seem that we perhaps held the answers to each other’s dilemmas and could tackle some very complex issues as a team.”

M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME
COHORT MEMBER

KEY PROGRAMME OUTCOMES



Following the learning programme, the grant scheme awarded funding to twelve organisations across the UK, engaging over 7,800 individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.

The groups were varied and included:

- People with learning difficulties
- Neurodivergent people
- People living with physical disabilities
- People living in areas of socio-economic challenge
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) communities
- Refugees
- People living with mental health issues
- Windrush generation
- Families of Black soldiers stationed in UK during WWII
- Elderly people with early stages of dementia



All project teams noted an enhanced sense of belonging, relevance and inspiring outcomes among project participants. 93% of the projects achieved social connection outcomes and 83% of projects supported individuals to develop new skills and a sense of agency within areas of research and innovation.

Strong relationships and collaborative partnerships were forged between cultural sector organisations, research organisations and minoritised community groups.

As a result of doing this work, grantees reported an increase in their confidence in working with their underrepresented communities.



THE NORTH EAST ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY ACADEMY GROUP PHOTO WITH WEST END REFUGEE SERVICES (WERS) AND KIELDER OBSERVATORY

The innovative research methods used by grantees not only resulted in positive benefits for individuals, but created opportunities for transformative, longer-term legacy within museums and science and discovery centres. Projects enabled voices from underrepresented groups to be heard, with 93% of all grantees expressing changed ways of working and excitement for the future legacy of M+M reaching across their organisations.

The twelve projects highlight the vital role of museums and science and discovery centres as trusted facilitators, providing spaces that empower future citizens to engage with, contribute to, and benefit from research and innovation.

> Assets and resources

- [M+M Evaluation Report](#), Cornish and Grey, 2024



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

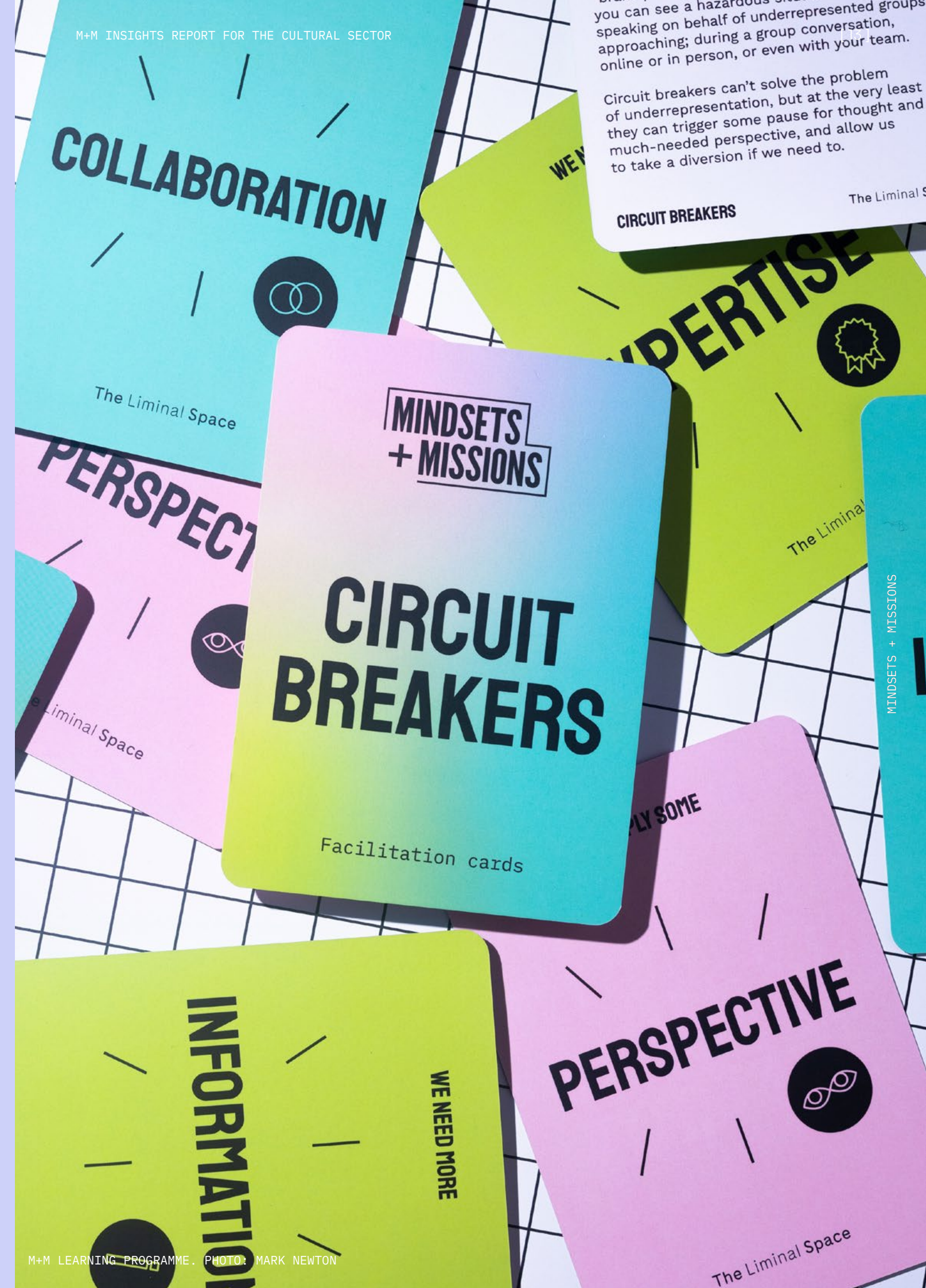
THE VALUE OF PROJECT NETWORKS

Many existing networks within communities and across geographical locations collaborated on M+M projects to achieve greater impact in a relatively short time frame. The programme demonstrated the real value in sustaining and building on relationships with existing community partners. Taking the time to nurture relationships before, during, and beyond funded projects is essential for more impactful and enduring initiatives. Cultivating new partnerships allows for fresh perspectives and expanded networks, but when time is a constraint for a project, the benefits of maintaining and growing a current partnership may outweigh the benefits of working with new groups when it comes to equity, as relationships are built at ‘the speed of trust’.

The evaluation of M+M also found that the support of the M+M team (the MA, ASDC, LS and Cornish and Grey, working alongside UKRI) was vital for the positive project outcomes, significantly contributing to overall success. Networks among grantees opened up cross-sector engagement and communication. Tailored coaching and mentoring supported practitioners to explore new, co-produced ways of working, giving them confidence that they had the support from their networks and funders to reach further than they had before. Feedback at various stages consistently indicated the positive impacts of this bespoke, open and transparent guidance to reach towards a more inclusive future for their audiences and for their organisations.

> Assets and resources

- [Stop. Look. Listen](#), a (6 min) animated guide from ASDC for practitioners to support equitable collaborations with community partners
- [Power to the People](#), a flexible framework from the MA helping museums understand and improve their participatory practice and community engagement
- [Working Equitably](#), a toolkit for museums and community organisations from the MA





M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

“I feel that we are being well supported and that there are people available for any questions we may have.”

M+M PROJECT
GRANT HOLDER

“Our meeting with [M+M project officer] gave us a lot of confidence to be more fluid and responsive.”

M+M PROJECT
GRANT HOLDER



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

APPLICATION OF LEARNING TO BEST PRACTICE

Central to M+M is the aspiration for museums and science and discovery centres to fully realise their potential as trusted conduits between research and society. This involves providing broader access to research, creating avenues for more people to influence and participate in research, and ensuring the universal benefits of research are transparent and widely felt. Additionally, the programme affirmed research as a powerful engagement tool, particularly with groups that typically don't visit these cultural institutions.

The M+M programme exemplified how science and discovery centres and museums can play a pivotal role in building more inclusive engagement and research practices.

By addressing systemic barriers and building meaningful partnerships, the programme provided a model for future ways of working in public engagement. M+M identified the need for a more equitable and inclusive ecology of contributors to research and innovation. It questioned what and whose knowledge is typically allowed to influence research and innovation, provided new insights and shared successful methodologies, and offers a guide for the continued evolution of practice within these cultural organisations.

There were successes and a number of challenges faced throughout the programme. Reflections from the M+M team, when considering lessons that support this way of working, include:

- Promote the urgency of co-production at all stages, with continued financial support to remove participation barriers. Allow the disruption of power balances within initial announcement and application stages. This includes re-framing who can lead project grant applications in order to avoid extractive practices.
- Re-consider the short duration of the grant-spend timescale where possible. The sector is heavily reliant on project funding, but it can stifle true innovation. Innovation flourishes where communities and organisations can plan strategically but also respond, adapt and grow. Partnerships need some level of consistent and flexible funding over multiple years to truly push boundaries and take risks.
- Explicitly and continually challenge persistent perspectives that 'research and innovation' must always be defined as something entirely novel, academic or the property of 'researchers'. Great depth and meaningful research and innovation can be aligned with the immediate interests, needs and priorities of local communities.



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

“Researchers need only work with their network of museums and science centres to connect with underrepresented groups authentically and ethically.”

CRAIG SMITH,
M+M PROJECT OFFICER, MA

- What happens to the knowledge and innovation generated within these projects? Dissemination of insights on a wider scale (social media, conferences and via publications including peer-reviewed journals) should be supported if it is to be heard and championed by those in the positions of power to shift research agendas. Ideal dissemination of this high level agenda goes beyond building pride in the success of achievements and providing opportunities for shared practice. The question remains of whether the perceptions of 'who' and 'what' is valued as research and innovation changes beyond this sector focus, and whether their legacy can influence research institutions and systems.



> Further valuable reading

- [Mindsets for Museums of the Future report](#) (LS, 2020), reflecting and rethinking the transformative role of culture and the museum.
- [Science and Discovery Centre Futures: Missions and Opportunities report](#) (LS, 2021) research across the sector to outline the future direction of Science and Discovery Centres for the next decade.
- [Museums Change Lives Campaign](#) (MA) demonstrating how museums of all sizes and collections are positively impacting people and communities.
- [The Inclusion website](#) (ASDC) top tips and resources to support equitable partnerships, creative evaluation ideas and inclusive practice and cultures within science and discovery centres and museums.

FUNDING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

“This was a really good project... it’s about the knowledge exchange, the connectivity, new ways of doing things... this is the type of funding we need to do this type of work.”

M+M PROJECT

M+M was a bold funding scheme that provided a glimpse into the transformative impacts that can be achieved when leveraging the partnerships, networks, resources and infrastructure within a national sector striving for equity, inclusion and socially engaged practice.

M+M enabled the sector to prioritise more inclusive and equitable outcomes for individuals and groups taking part and has gone some way to raise the visibility, value and recognition of the sector for this work. The funding was supportive and exploratory, allowing deeper relationships to develop between research institutions and community groups.

However, maintaining activity at a similar level or growing new partnerships to a similar depth is impossible without some level of ongoing funding.

The MA and the ASDC both report that members are grappling with an extremely challenging and unstable landscape, placing this work at high risk. There is a multifaceted funding crisis impacting science and discovery centres and museums, caused by interrelated factors such as rising operational costs, depleted reserves post-pandemic and geopolitical influences causing ongoing instability and uncertainty. The impacts are felt in prolonged public funding cuts and restricted budgets from more diverse income streams such as business and industry sponsorship, venue hire and other creative partnerships that support financial resilience and sustainability. At a time when public participation in research and innovation has never been more crucial, this work is under threat.

The cultural sector of museums and science and discovery centres demonstrates the capacity to prioritise this essential work. They provide a vital, national infrastructure that enables, emboldens and amplifies seldom-heard voices from underrepresented communities, creating a dynamic bridge between research, innovation and society. If funders value this work, then opportunities for longer-term funding and structural support are urgently required for this work to thrive.



M+M LEARNING PROGRAMME. PHOTO: MARK NEWTON

PICTURED CLOCKWISE FROM BACK LEFT: CHAMION CABALLERO, THE MIXED MUSEUM; STEPHEN BRESLIN, ASDC CHAIR, GLASGOW SCIENCE CENTRE; HANNAH MATTERSON, KIELDER OBSERVATORY; NIKHIL MISTRY, WONDERSEEKERS; CONOR ELLIS, DYNAMIC EARTH; KATE ALLEN, RIX INCLUSIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON; SCOT OWEN, XPLORE!; LEE PHILLIPS, PURPLESTARS GROUP MEMBER; CRAIG SMITH, MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION; SALLY COLVIN, MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION; STEVE SCOTT, UK RESEARCH AND INNOVATION; SHAAARON LEVERMENT, ASSOCIATION FOR SCIENCE AND DISCOVERY CENTRES; OTTOLINE LEYSER, UK RESEARCH AND INNOVATION; DENIZE LEDEATTE, NATIONAL WINDRUSH MUSEUM

MINDSETS + MISSIONS



MINDSETS + MISSIONS GROUP PHOTO AT THE 2024 ASDC NATIONAL

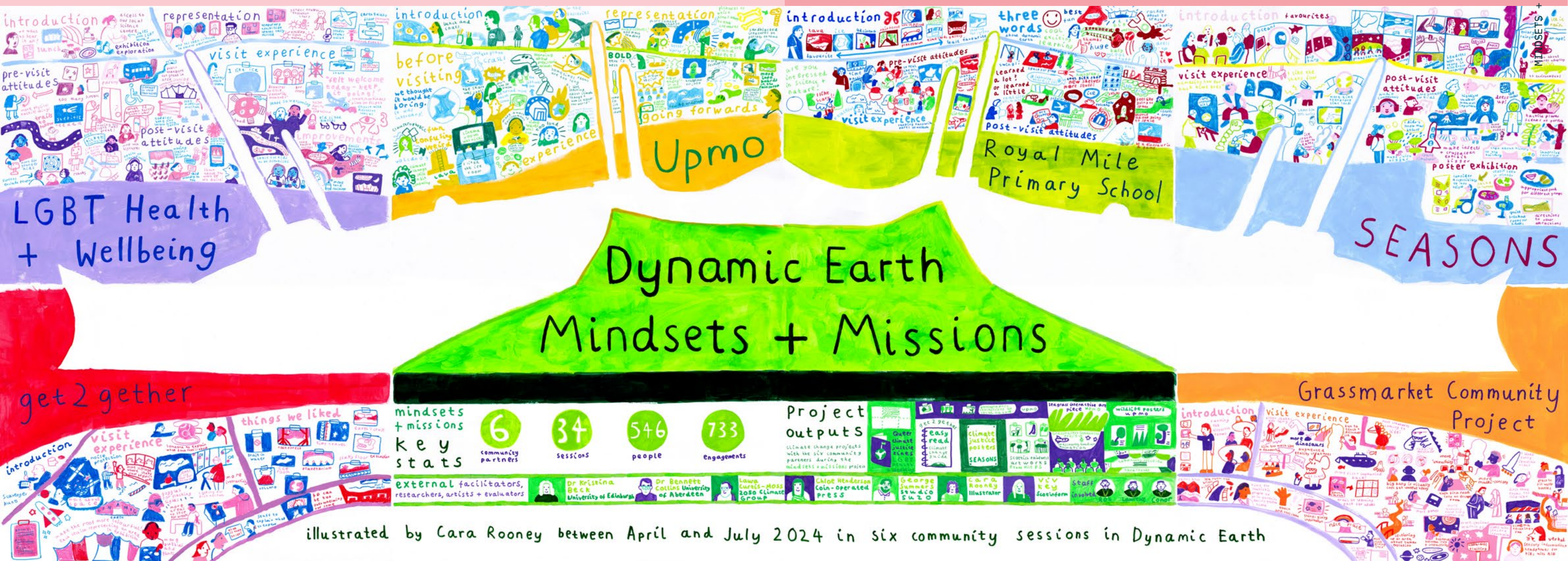
MUSEUMS AND DISCOVERY CENTRES WORKING TOGETHER

How can organisations across the museum, gallery and science and discovery centre sector work together to reduce costs and enhance outcomes for individuals and for society? How can we work together - regionally or nationally - to achieve Carbon Net Zero goals and targets?

Where and how can collaboration increase engagement and involvement of under-represented communities outside of funded projects?

What possibilities are there for cross-sector or cross-organisational branding and advocacy?

MURAL FROM SIX COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS AT DYNAMIC EARTH, SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ACTION



PURPLESTARS WORKSHOP WITH AMGUEDDFA CYMRU - MUSEUM OF WALES.

The two reports, 'Mindsets for Museums of the Future' and 'Science and Discovery Centre Futures: Missions and Opportunities', provided insight into the shared future visioning, organisational priorities, and untapped potential within the two sectors. In turn, M+M saw the benefits of closer alignment between science centres and museums.

From an audience perspective, there is little discernible difference between these two types of organisations. The way audiences engage, the reasons people choose to visit, and the nature of community outreach and inclusion initiatives all point towards a convergence of purpose.

Similarly, the learning and development journeys undertaken by museums and science and discovery centres are remarkably alike. Both seek to remain relevant and enhance the lives of their



LISTENING TO SOUNDSCAPES AND PROMOTING NATURE CONNECTION WITH WONDERSEEKERS



audiences. Both seek to expand their reach to serve a broader demographic, to achieve organisational sustainability and respond effectively within a rapidly changing society grappling with interconnected crises. Increasingly, organisations in both sectors articulate their long-term aims in social or civic terms, aligning their funding, programmes and partnerships behind values-led work.

Increased collaboration between discovery centres and museums enabled a more unified, evidence-led approach to community engagement and empowerment. It paves the way for streamlined, place-based working between multiple organisations and their local communities. It presents an opportunity for the natural integration of STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Maths) and associated methods and skills - identified as a national priority - across services, as well as a chance to break down artificial boundaries between STEM and the arts, culture and creativity.

Work led by the ASDC to establish and test a set of collective inclusive social outcomes which can be measured to evidence meaningful impacts of engagements is as relevant to museums socially engaged as it is to the science centre sector. The thoughtful, action-led work by the MA on decolonising museums is another example where the creation

DR LES JOHNSON AND PADDY ROGERS SHAKE HANDS ON A LANDMARK COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL WINDRUSH MUSEUM AND ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH.



and national rollout of a framework for museums provides key guidance for the collections of interactives, workshops and programming that exists in science and discovery centres.

Concrete examples of the value of cross-sectoral working can be found in various M+M projects, showing that shared learning and grant programmes are an important catalyst for achieving the benefits of this collaboration. Working together enables better use of resources, reduces duplication, shares essential data to inform decisions, supports joint advocacy, shares skills and experiences and achieves greater results through collaborative efforts. This is particularly relevant for the most pressing ‘big’ sector issues such as decarbonisation, wellbeing, equity, inclusion and access. The ASDC and the MA will continue to work to achieve greater impact together.



STREET COSMOS, EXPLORING SPACE AND ASTRONOMY RESEARCH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM.

Assets and resources

- The ‘Valuing Inclusion’ [Theory of Change](#) (ASDC) Developed through extensive research across the science museum and discovery centre sector and central to the evaluation approach of M+M, we encourage you to explore how these inclusive outcomes relate to your work.
- [Decolonising Museums](#) (MA) unreservedly supporting initiative to decolonise museums and their collections resources supporting decolonisation in museums.

