

Pleasure, Connection and Purpose

*How museums can leverage emotions
to build greater public support*

February 2023



Art Fund_



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Cover image: 'Project What If?' exhibition at We The Curious
© We The Curious - Thomas Buttery/Limbic Cinema
Right: Prospect cottage, saved after an Art Fund campaign
© Photo: Thierry Bal

FOREWORD

The start of 2023 has seen the continued impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, which have presented considerable challenges to museums' operations, staff, and audiences. AIM's recent Impacts Survey (September 2022) saw 40% of organisations planning to scale down activity and over a third struggling to increase income given economy-wide pressures. Taking into account these challenges, Art Fund's Looking Ahead Museum Directors Research (May 2022) found increasing earned income and developing relationships with communities were major priorities for the year ahead.

Even in the face of such adversity, there are numerous examples of passionate people across the UK supporting campaigns to 'save' their local museums.

What drives them? What can be learned about how local people feel about their museums? And how might we harness the public's emotions in a more sustained way, rather than when under threat?

Now more than ever, we need to better understand how museums can leverage emotions to build greater public support. That understanding should help museums, funders and sector support organisations make a more compelling case to the public, and to policymakers, for that support.

This novel research, undertaken over summer 2022 by behavioural research and insights consultancy M.E.L, seeks to understand which emotions most powerfully drive public support for museums.

For those developing campaigns, it explores how to leverage the power of emotions to build greater public support. Through case studies and guidance, it looks at how campaigns are mounted, how people are mobilised, what motivates those involved, and what narratives or strategies resonate most effectively.

For those wanting to build longer-term emotional connection with their audiences, it includes practical recommendations for fostering emotionally driven engagement for museums, funding bodies and IPSOs/SSOs.

We hope by highlighting the motivations behind emotional engagement in the museum context, we can strengthen your work, not just when campaigning, but in building sustained and sustainable relationships with your communities.

We are grateful to the museums who took time to participate in this research and are proud to support museums as they find creative ways to activate emotionally driven public support.

Lisa Ollerhead, AIM Director

**Sarah Philp
Director of Programme and Policy, Art Fund**

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the research from Skylark Recovery Trust & Alternatives Community Based Recovery, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art, Williamson Museum and Art Gallery, Creswell Crags, Newtown Textile Museum, Lowewood Museum and the Cinema Museum.

We would also like to thank all members of the online community and individuals who completed our final in-depth qualitative capture.

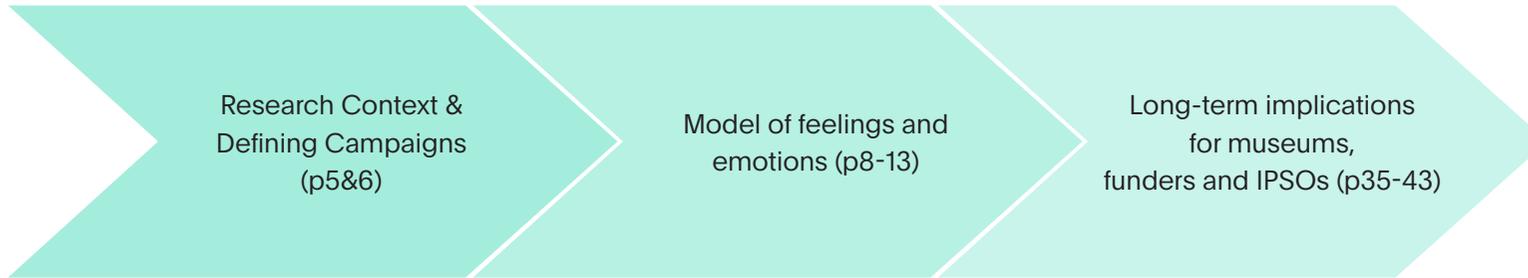
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WAYFINDING

I want to understand the context, theory and the longer-term implications



I want advice and examples on developing emotional campaigns



I want to think more about using emotions in my museum in general



RESEARCH CONTEXT

How can museums leverage the public's emotions in order to build sustained support for the museum sector? When a museum is facing closure or another threat, public support can soar. But how might we sustain this emotionally driven support on a long-term basis, and how does this translate into short-term campaigns?

We (M.E.L) were commissioned by the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) and Art Fund to investigate which emotions drive public support for museums, why certain emotions are more powerful than others, and how museums might use these emotions to channel support amongst their communities as we emerge from the pandemic, but continue to face potentially challenging times.

We found that museums spark emotions of pleasure, purpose and connection in their visitors, communities and the wider general public.

This report provides insight and practical ways in which your museum might galvanise these emotions to connect with audiences on a deep emotional level.

Guiding questions

- *What can we learn from successful and unsuccessful campaigns to save museums, and how they worked on an emotional level?*
- *What emotions are at play in those campaigns, and how are they leveraged to make a difference and to engage the wider public?*
- *What insights or lessons can be transferred or harnessed so that museums, funders and sector support orgs might encourage greater public engagement before the threat arises?*
- *What arguments resonate on the emotional level in the public consciousness?*
- *What are the implications for influencing policy?*



Art Happens, Paula the Polar Bear, Turner Contemporary, 2018. Photo: Manu Palomeque

DEFINING 'CAMPAIGNS FOR SUPPORT'

When researching museums to participate in this research, we drew up a long list of museums from across the UK, of different sizes, with different funding arrangements and with different subject matters. All had mounted or been subject to different types of campaigns for support. We sought to include museums who:

- Had been at risk of closure, budget cuts, or reduced hours;
- Had received opposition to proposed plans to change scope or remit;
- Had not reopened after COVID-19;
- Had not yet opened (i.e. were a proposed new museum or heritage project)
- Had been the subject of petitions for support (either initiated by the museum themselves or third parties);
- Had crowdfunded for funds to conserve a particular object or collection;
- Had crowdfunded for essential funds to remain open;
- Had launched a campaign through Art Happens, Art Fund's free crowdfunding platform for museum and galleries;

The seven museums and communities we interviewed in-depth had experienced varying levels of public support, from hugely successful crowdfunders, to campaigns which had little public engagement.



Art Happens, 'Why did the gallery cross the road?', South London Gallery, Fire Station opening weekend. Photo: Rosie Reed Gold

APPROACH

This project was conducted across four stages:

1. Qualitative interviews with museum leaders

We interviewed museum staff who had been responsible for leading on public campaigns for support.

2. Qualitative interviews with community leaders

We spoke to members of the public who were part of a museum's community (either local communities or communities of interest) who had played significant roles in mobilising campaigns for support. For example: launching a petition, sitting on a Friends committee, or volunteering at the museum.

3. Online research community

We ran an online qualitative community of 24 members of the public covering all nations of the UK and from a wide range of communities and backgrounds. Participants submitted their thoughts about different topics in writing, through photo submissions or by recording videos of themselves across five days, resulting in around 40 hours of engagement.

4. Sector survey

AIM members and the wider sector were invited to submit their experiences of running campaigns for support through an online survey.

We spoke to museum and community leaders connected with the following museums across the UK:

- **Skylark**, Dumbarton, Scotland
- **St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art**, Glasgow, Scotland
- **Williamson Museum and Art Gallery**, Birkenhead
- **Creswell Craggs**, Worksop
- **Newtown Textile Museum**, Newtown, Wales
- **Lowewood Museum**, Greater London
- **Cinema Museum**, London



Creswell Craggs Museum and Heritage Centre, exterior and visitor centre, © Creswell Craggs Museum and Heritage Centre



A model of feelings and emotions

Student Roadtrippers visit the Horniman Museum & Gardens, winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022. © Amaal Said/Art Fund 2022

MUSEUMS EVOKE THREE KEY FEELINGS: PLEASURE, CONNECTION AND PURPOSE.

Our research uncovered dozens of different emotional responses to museums – from joy to fascination to love – in keeping with the existing literature around museums and emotions.

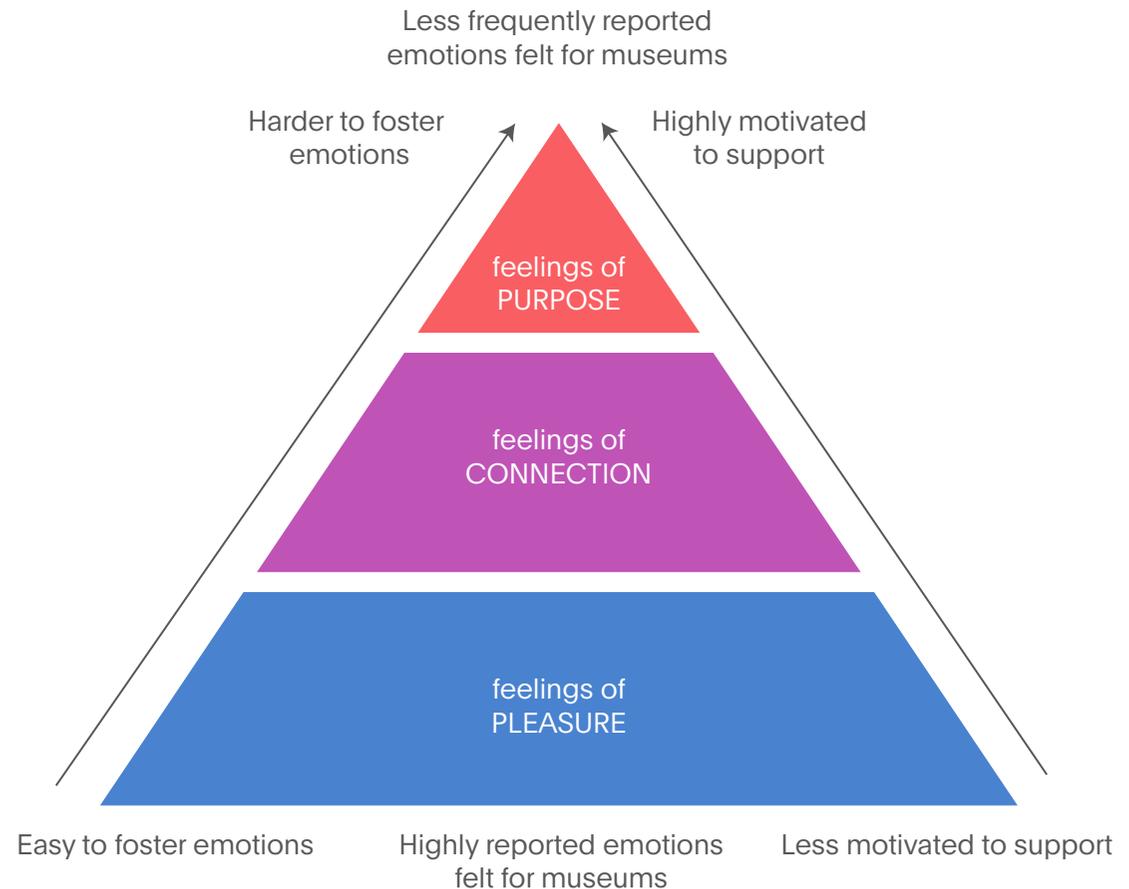
We examined how these emotional responses translated into public support, and in doing so found that the emotions that museums evoke in their audience can be grouped into three key categories, or groups, of emotions, which we are calling ‘feelings’:

1. Pleasure 2. Connection 3. Purpose

Feelings of **pleasure** – feeling entertained, excited or relaxed – were widespread in museum visitors. They were easy emotions to evoke in museum experiences. However, they were fleeting emotions that were difficult to sustain long-term. As a result, museums that only evoked pleasurable emotions found it difficult to sustain long-term support.

Feelings of **connection** – feeling recognised, accepted and connected with people, places and ideas – were slightly less common, but had a stronger impact on the degree of public support. These emotions had more of a lasting effect on audiences than pleasurable emotions, and as a result were more of a motivating factor for people to provide their support to museums – whether their time, money or putting their name to a petition.

Feelings of **purpose** – feeling a sense of duty, responsibility or personal fulfilment were the emotions that drove the greatest amount of deep and sustained support. However, they are also the most difficult to intentionally invoke in people. These were the emotional drivers that motivated community leaders, volunteers and trustees to work in support of their local museums, and were the emotions that were felt both most intensely and long-term.



SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS FOR SUPPORT DEPEND UPON MUSEUMS COMMUNICATING HOW THEY:

Give us purpose...

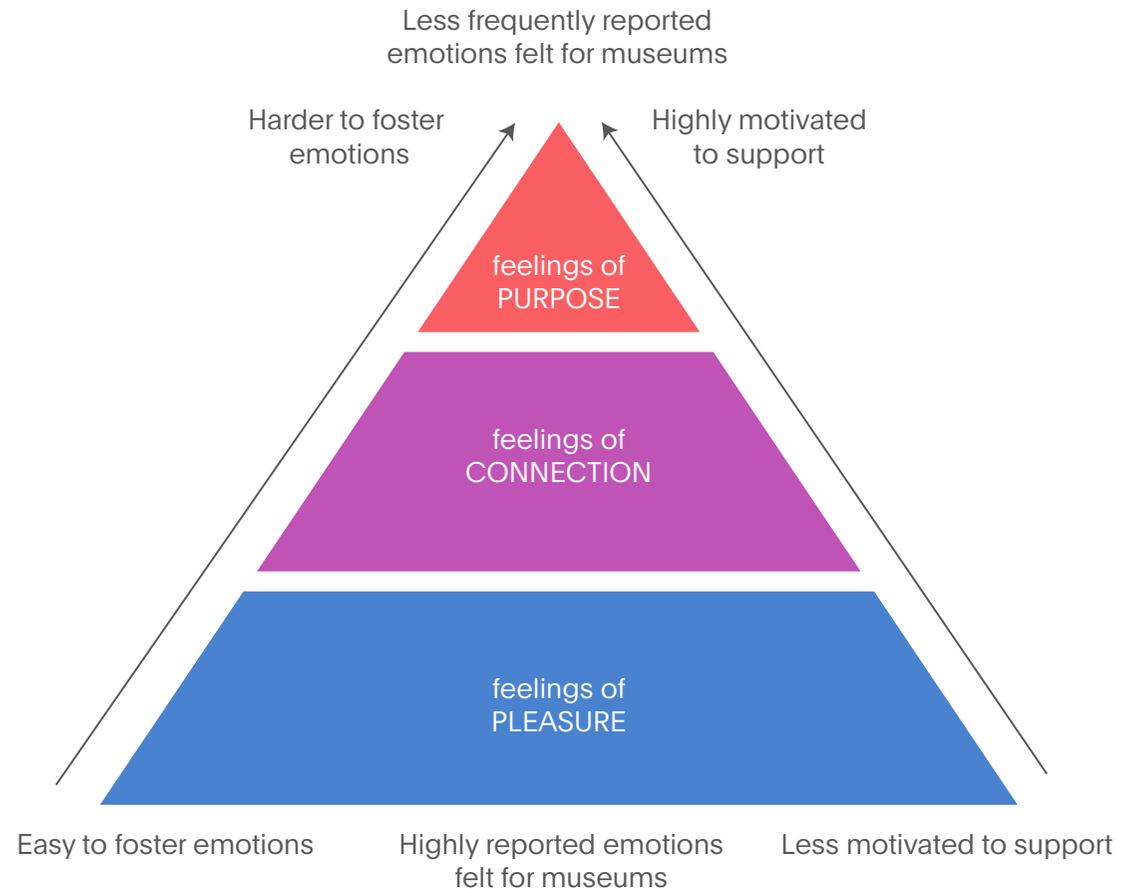
Through feeling we are part of something **BIGGER**; our lives have **MEANING**; we are **SIGNIFICANT**; we are free to **LEARN** and work on our own **SELF DEVELOPMENT**; our stories are **WORTH TELLING**; we share **COMMON GROUND**; we share **COMMON INTERESTS**; we can broaden our **WORLD VIEW**; we have a community asset of which we can be **PROUD**; we have a personal connection with the **EXTRAORDINARY**; we can make a **POSITIVE DIFFERENCE**; we play an **IMPORTANT ROLE** in society; we have a **DUTY** to preserve these stories for future generations.

Make us feel emotionally connected...

To **OURSELVES**; to our **LOVED ONES**; to our **COMMUNITIES**; to **HISTORY**; to our **HERITAGE**; to our **IDENTITIES**; to **PLACES**; to our **LOCALITIES**; to our **ANCESTORS**; to the **MUSEUMS THEMSELVES**.

Bring us pleasure by...

Sparking **ENJOYMENT**; being **ENTERTAINING**; providing opportunities to **BOND** and **SOCIALISE**; providing a **SAFE** and **WELCOMING** space; improving our **MENTAL** and **PHYSICAL WELLBEING**; boosting **SELF ESTEEM**; providing the setting for **HAPPY MEMORIES**.



CAMPAIGNS THAT PLAY UPON PLEASURABLE EMOTIONS ARE 'QUICK WINS': THESE EMOTIONS ARE THE EASIEST TO EVOKE, BUT RESULT IN FLEETING SUPPORT.

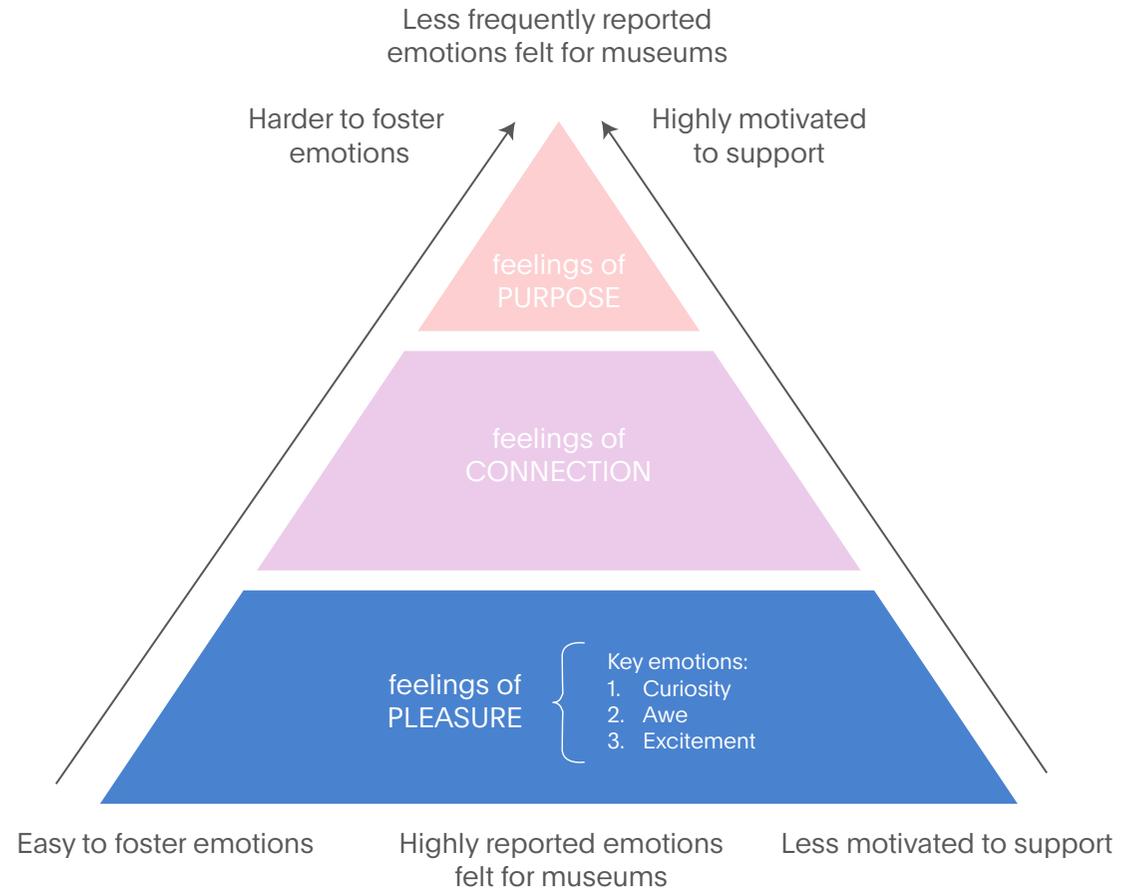
For most visitors, museums generate pleasurable emotions. They act as sanctuaries where we can feel relaxed, venues to socialise and have fun with friends, or places where we can feel mentally stimulated.

We found museums had the potential to make the public feel:

- Entertained
- Delighted
- Love
- Awe
- Wonder
- Satisfied
- Amused
- Excited
- Confident
- Amazed
- Joyful
- Content

Emotions of pleasure are characterised by:

- + Being easy to foster – occurring as a result of museums' day-to-day work
- + Diverse in nature – there are many different types of pleasurable emotions from relaxation to excitement
- + Commonplace – most people leave a museum with at least one positive emotion, even if it's as simple as feeling entertained
- Lower emotional intensity – positive emotions tend not to be felt as strongly, and don't last very long
- Not as likely to result in active, long-term support for a museum, due to their fleeting nature. Visitors may donate a few pounds, but not support the museum in earnest.



INSPIRING EMOTIONAL CONNECTION ALLOWS FOR CAMPAIGNS TO REACH A WIDER CROSS-SECTION OF THE PUBLIC BEYOND MUSEUMS' CORE SUPPORTERS.

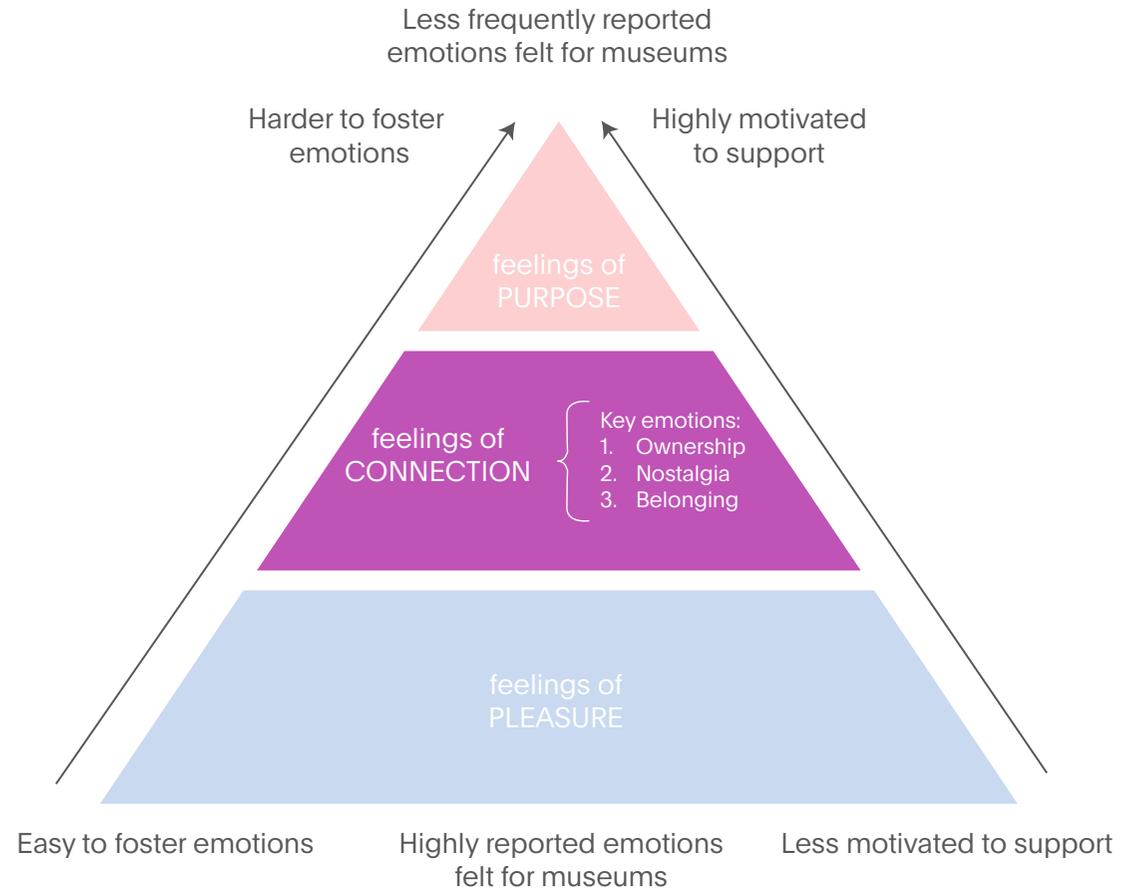
Museums make audiences feel emotionally connected to other people, things and places. Museums have the potential to make people feel appreciated or valued by others, feel cohesion amongst community and society, make people feel humble and 'part of something bigger' and make them feel connected to their local history, heritage, or sense of place.

We found museums had the potential to make the public feel:

- Connected
- Understood
- Valued
- 'Seen'
- Cohesive
- Attached
- Appreciated
- Recognised
- Supported
- Relevant
- Safe
- Ownership

Emotions of purpose are characterised by:

- + Moderate emotional intensity
- + Cutting across both highly-engaged museum supporters and the general public alike
- + Resulting in moderate support – strong enough driver to motivate people to action
- Being dependent on museums having strong links to something to build emotional connections (e.g. community, history, place, mission).



FEELINGS OF PURPOSE ARE THE MOST POWERFUL EMOTIONAL DRIVERS, BUT ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT FOR MUSEUMS AND CAMPAIGNS TO CULTIVATE.

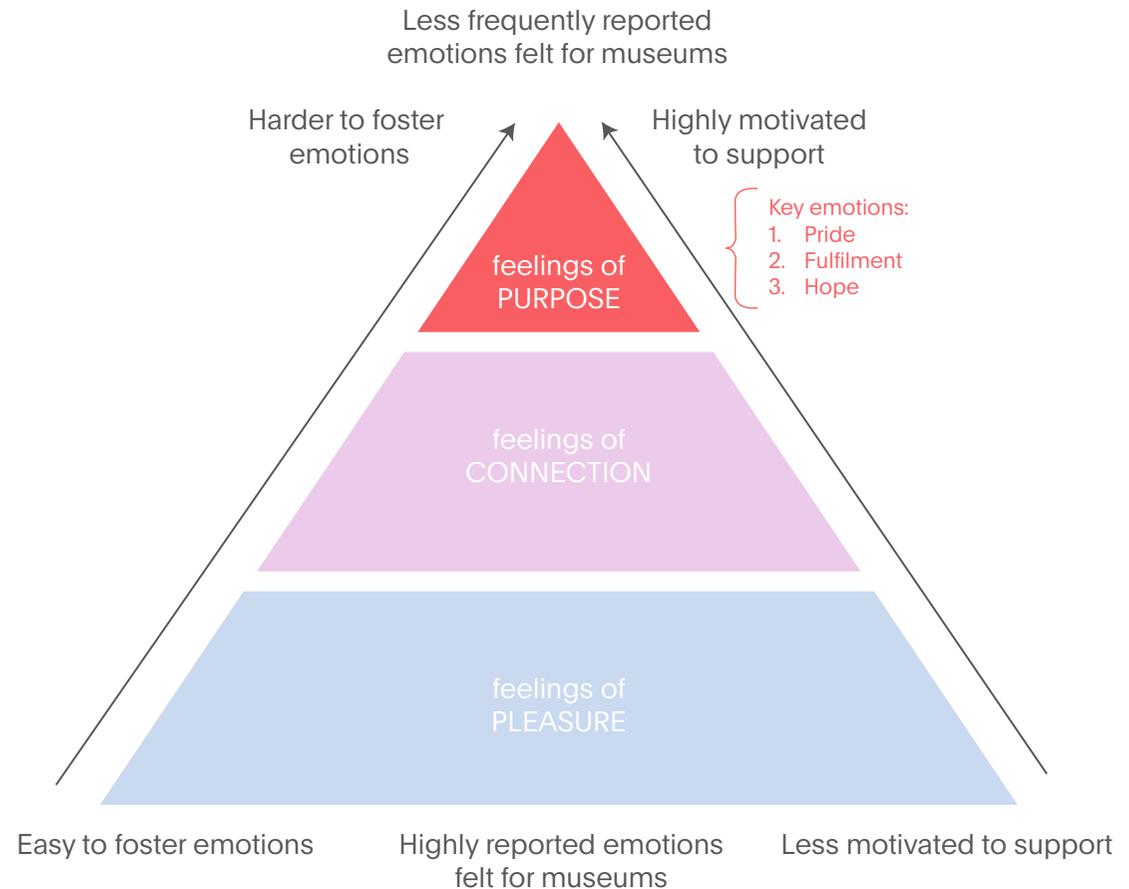
The public had the strongest emotional response to museums' campaigns for support when they felt strong personal emotions of purpose such as duty, responsibility, fulfilment or empowerment.

We found museums had the potential to make the public feel:

- Responsible
- Dutiful
- Useful
- Empowered
- Knowledgeable
- Important
- Self-aware
- Successful
- Influential
- Reverential
- Fulfilled
- Generous

Emotions of purpose are characterised by:

- + Very high emotional intensity
- + Lasting long-term – stemming from deeply held beliefs about what people want from their life and what they think matters
- + Being more likely to result in 'strong' support – e.g. becoming a Friend or community champion or large/regular donations
- Difficult for museums to foster spontaneously – need a much deeper understanding of what matters to supporters
- Not having broad appeal – often only felt by a minority of visitors to any one site



Identifying where to start



The Exhibition of Hope at the National Wool Museum,
October 2021 – January 2022. Courtesy Amgueddfa Cymru

IDENTIFYING YOUR STARTING POINT

Before taking action – whether in the shape of a campaign, designing a new programme, or making the case for support – you need to evaluate where your museum currently sits on the pyramid. How do you *currently* resonate on an emotional level with audiences – and which feelings would you like to foster more in the future?

It is easiest to foster feelings of pleasure in your audience and a wide range of supporters – but this is likely to result in short-term, light-touch support.

It is much harder to evoke emotions that give a feeling of purpose to your audience – but if you succeed, you are likely to experience stronger, sustained support from a highly engaged group of loyal supporters.

To identify the current level of emotional connection to your museum, you might want to start by asking questions such as:

- How large is my current audience? Is it broad, but made up of one-time visitors, or small, but made up of loyal supporters?
- Do people report any sort of emotional reaction when they visit? Either in feedback to staff, Google or TripAdvisor reviews or comment cards? Using word clouds can be a quick way to check this.
- How have people responded to previous campaigns for support? What were their reasons for supporting you, and which emotions underpinned these reasons?
- Why do people visit you? What does your museum offer them emotionally that nowhere else can?



Union Street Party 2020, Nudge Community Builders, Plymouth. Photo: Dom Moore

YOUR CURRENT POSITIONING

This is the perfect opportunity to ask your audiences what emotions your museum evokes in them. Conducting even light-touch audience research before undertaking a new campaign will help you to gauge your community's current level of emotional engagement with your organisation.

As a starting point, we found that the following tended to be true of organisations that evoked feelings of Purpose, Connection and Pleasure in their audiences. These can act as a quick 'audit' for how your organisation is currently engaging with the public on an emotional level.

Pleasure

- Has broad, popular appeal but fewer 'loyal' supporters
- Produces vivid memories of a 'fun' or 'memorable' day out – sticks in people's memories as entertaining, educational or insightful
- Provides moments of awe or curiosity – 'wow' moments.
- People visit for the emotional benefits 'in the moment' but visits don't tend to have long-term lasting emotional impact

Connection

- Has a moderate level of engaged advocates and supporters
- Provides different ways of engaging with people (from the past and present), places, ideas and histories
- Has connections with other community groups or organisations
- Audiences tend to visit many times but across a significant period of time – revisiting at significant moments in their life (e.g. taking their children to their favourite childhood museum)
- People feel the museum reflects or speaks for their community

Purpose

- Has a core base of loyal supporters and/or volunteers
- Clearly communicates the value of its work to the community
- Plays a prominent role in its community – either a community of interest or a local/geographical community
- Provides people with an opportunity to shape the museum
- Produces change – in its local community, in its ways of working, in society at large
- Many repeat visits across the year – the museum plays a meaningful role in people's lives in the long-term
- People feel personally invested in the museum – it's a reflection of them and their values

YOUR DESIRED EMOTIONAL POSITIONING

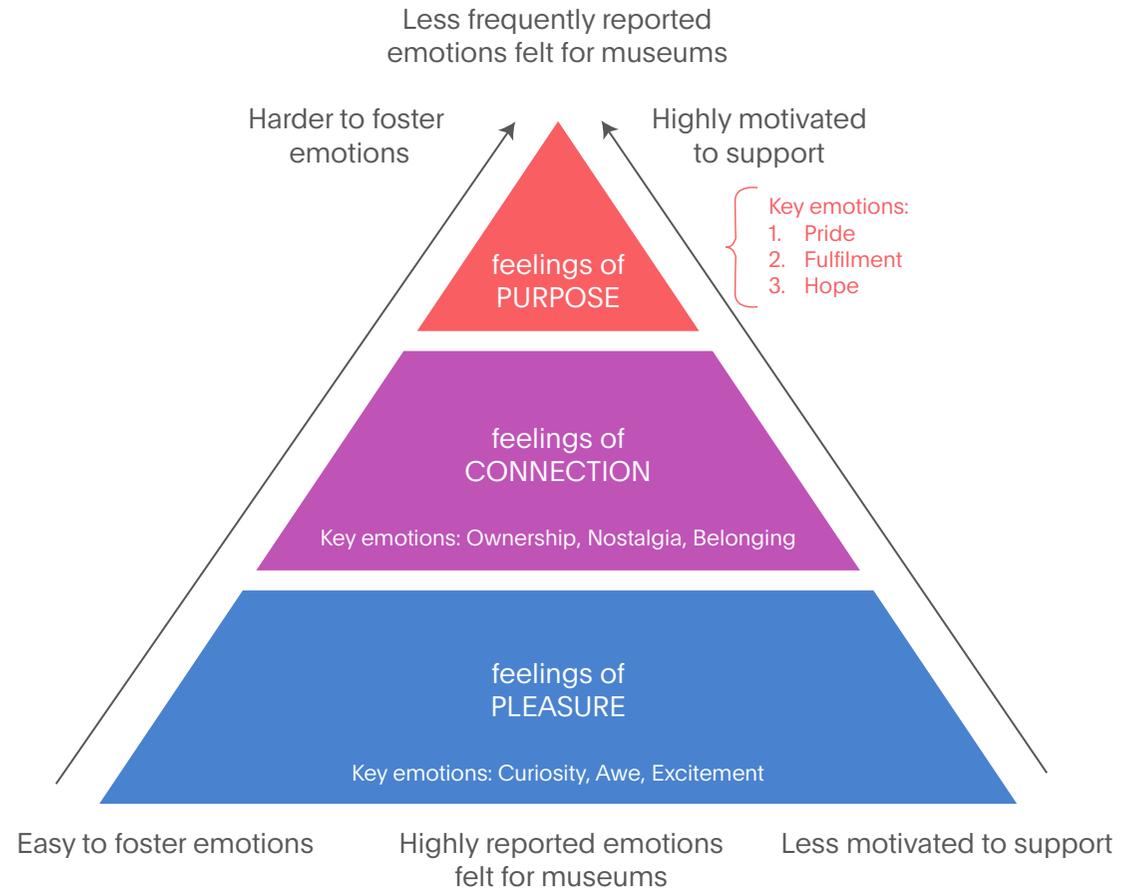
Once you have identified your museum's **current** positioning, you can consider ways to develop deeper connections with some or all audiences.

Be realistic about what you can achieve – targeting everyone often means targeting no one.

Our model highlights the key emotions that most help to drive feelings of pleasure, connection and purpose in visitors and audiences.

The following sections provide an outline of how to approach this, including:

- An outline of the 9 key emotions and tips to foster them in your audiences
- Recommendations for creating campaigns that resonate emotionally





Nine key emotions:
The building blocks of emotionally resonant campaigns

Nine key emotions

Inside Prospect Cottage, saved in 2020 after a successful Art Fund campaign. © Photo: Thierry Bal

WE IDENTIFIED NINE KEY EMOTIONS THAT DRIVE PEOPLE TO ACT IN SUPPORT OF MUSEUMS.

Nine key emotions stood out as powerful emotional drivers that rallied people to support a museum that mattered to them. These are the building blocks of the three overarching feelings identified earlier: **Pleasure**, **Connection** and **Purpose**.

Designing a campaign for support around one of these nine key emotions will increase the likelihood of the campaign or project resonating emotionally with the public, and likely result stronger public support.

We provide a two-page summary for each emotion, to use as a reference when thinking about these nine emotions as 'building blocks' for the foundation of an emotionally resonant campaign.

Each summary details why that emotion is important in the context of museums, questions and talking points, as well as suggestions and recommendations on how to foster that emotion when designing campaigns. Further case studies and 'best practice' examples of each emotion are included in the appendix of this report.

1. **PRIDE:** Museums make people feel proud: of their identity, of their heritage, of their community.
2. **HOPE:** Museums inspire optimism and make people feel hopeful.
3. **FULFILMENT:** Museums provide emotionally rewarding learning experiences, which make people feel fulfilled.
4. **BELONGING:** Museums provide welcoming spaces which make us feel like we belong.
5. **NOSTALGIA:** People's memories of museums are loaded with emotion – nostalgia is a key motivator for supporting museums.
6. **OWNERSHIP:** People are highly invested in museums when they feel a sense of ownership over them.
7. **CURIOSITY:** Feeling curious about the world drives our motivation to engage with museums.
8. **EXCITEMENT:** The promise of seeing amazing, one-of-a-kind things sparks excitement in people.
9. **AWE:** People feel in awe of the scale of museums' collections, and often of the physical spaces or objects themselves.

PRIDE

Pride was amongst the largest motivating forces for people to want to save museums in need.

Geographical communities felt a sense of pride that their local museum told the story of their local area, and pride that their story and heritage was 'worth sharing'. Communities of interest felt proud that a topic they cared passionately about had its own dedicated space where people could explore and learn more about their hobby or interest.

Pride focuses on other people or things ("I am proud of and feel good about my local museum...") and on the self ("pride in my local museum makes me feel good"). Feeling proud brings us pleasure, makes us feel connected to others, and brings us meaning.

How might your campaign for support:

- Make people feel proud about themselves?
- Make people feel proud about their community?
- Make people feel proud about their local history or place?
- Make people feel proud about their culture and heritage?
- Make people feel proud about the actions and values of their community – for example in promoting community cohesion, or supporting people in need?
- Make people realise how they would feel if the object of their pride (the museum) had to close.

How to foster long-term PRIDE

During COVID-19, it was widely reported that the prevalence of community spirit and local pride skyrocketed. The incredible support that was mobilised in community's hour of need was a sense of immense pride for many – and many museums played an active role in supporting that community effort.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) published guidance in the early weeks and months of the pandemic titled *Museums and COVID-19: 8 steps to support community resilience*. They recommended:

"Monitor developments and changing societal needs; listen to your communities and determine how you can help.

"Try to understand the current situation and its impact on society and especially the most vulnerable community groups in your specific context. For instance, we have seen that those hit hardest by the current crisis are the homeless, women at risk of domestic violence, children with difficult access to education, migrants, refugees, and minorities experiencing increased discrimination and xenophobia."

While the worst of the pandemic is (hopefully) behind us, the way in which museums not only use their collections to celebrate the heritage of communities, but also actively support and encourage them, is a huge source of pride for the general public.

HOPE

Museums document the history of human endeavour. As such they offer **hope** for how we might continue to grow and improve society in the future.

Research participants shared that museums made them feel hopeful because they exposed people to a diversity of perspectives, which – if more people visited museums – they felt confident would result in increased empathy and cooperation in the future.

Museums document the very best and very worst of humanity for us to learn from – what might the world look like if this record was not available as a resource for us to reference?

How might your campaign for support:

- Demonstrate the value of your collections in advocating for a better world?
- Offer hope to challenges that individuals and groups in your community are facing?
- Provide optimism and inspiration for people who are struggling?
- Demonstrate the good that your museum does for the community?
- Is working to address the injustices that people face?

How to foster long-term HOPE

Focus on the role the museum can play in the future.

Hope is inherently a future-focused emotion. To encourage feelings of hope, museums need to be forward-looking. How might museums contribute towards local plans or strategies to improve their locality? What role might museums play in the future of the community? How can museums show that people have emerged out the other side of tough times before, and will do so again?

Look at the big picture and be an agent for positive change.

Museums can be fun days out, or provide a couple of hours' quiet reflection on a rainy afternoon. But they are also mirrors to society: they reflect how humankind has behaved in the past, so we know what we can improve in the future.



People take part in 'Women's Lot', a performance involving maypole dancing and song inspired by C18th folk ballads, created by Sally Gilford in collaboration with community arts group Oakenhoof, for Art Assembly 2022. © Chris Payne/Art Fund 2022

FULFILMENT

Museums offer ways (and places) for people to feel emotionally **fulfilled**, through the satisfaction of learning, being inspired, being creative, innovating or exploring.

Interacting with – and specifically collaborating and contributing towards – museums makes people feel emotionally fulfilled. It makes them feel they are tapping into something bigger, broadening their understanding and knowledge of the world, and improving themselves as a result.

How might your campaign for support:

- Remind people of the untapped value of the collection – for enjoyment, learning, inspiration, creativity, or another form of personal development?
- Think outside the box and find ways that the collection can fulfil audiences in ways beyond 'learning'?
- Communicate the significance of your museum's collection to wider scholarship or understanding of the museum's subject matter (for example, local history)?

How to foster long-term FULFILMENT

Provide opportunities for self-development and achievement.

Actively pursuing ways to improve ourselves is a sure-fire way of feeling emotionally fulfilled. How might museums provide opportunities for people to feel like they are learning new skills, expanding their knowledge, or growing as a person? How might museums offer programmes that makes a long-term difference to people's lives?

Allow people to find personal meaning by opening up interpretation to multiple perspectives.

What one person might take away from an object or exhibition might be very different to the next person. Consider how people's backgrounds, life experiences or beliefs might influence the way they respond to an object in your collection. How might you offer multiple perspectives in your interpretation, so that people can draw their own personal meaning, which in turn can allow them to feel fulfilled.

"I love studying things that are wholly different to my own life and culture, and I got the greatest satisfaction from studying cultures with different religions, languages, diets, outlook on life, etc."

Online community participant

BELONGING

Museums provide spaces for people to **belong** – somewhere they feel accepted and recognised for who they are.

Museums are somewhere where we have the freedom to pursue our own personal journeys of self-discovery or to share these with other people. The feeling of belonging centres around emotions such as happiness, comfort, feeling seen or accepted, and feeling welcome.

This was a particularly prevalent emotion amongst museums we interviewed who had well-established outreach programmes working with under served areas of the community, such as people in recovery or looked after children. For these audiences, the way museums made them feel – accepted, seen, appreciated and understood – meant that they were amongst the strongest advocates for the museums who sought to welcome them.

How might your campaign for support:

- Make the public feel welcomed, recognised and understood?
- Demonstrate that the museum shares similar values or beliefs – to communities, individuals, or particular groups?
- Emphasise your “welcome” journey – whether physical, or metaphorical?
- Speak to people as equals, using their speech and terms of reference?
- Communicate that everyone is welcome at the museum – even if you assume that people already know this to be true?

How to foster long-term BELONGING

Proactively encourage diversity of viewpoints.

It is essential to reach out to individuals and communities who are not currently represented in your museum. Museums need to create a welcoming, non-judgemental environment that welcomes a diversity of perspectives, lived experience and stories, and this will often require dedicated outreach to invite people into the museum whose stories are not currently being served.

Provide people – audiences, volunteers – with their own spaces in the museum – both physical and metaphorical.

To feel at home in public spaces, people need to feel they have their own space which they can comfortably inhabit on their own terms. This might look like dedicated physical areas of the museum where community groups or volunteers feel free to programme their own exhibitions as they see fit, or alternatively inviting people to have their own ‘space’ in the museum metaphorically – through collaboration, consultation, dialogue and representation.

“We have a volunteers’ room downstairs and volunteers are decorating that space and making it their own. I’ve just started a volunteers newsletter, and I want to do a sort of meet and greet over a cup of tea and a slice of cake. They will engage more, they will know that they are valued within the wider Creswell Craggs team.”
Creswell Craggs Leadership

NOSTALGIA

Research participants' **nostalgic** memories of happy excursions with family, friends or schoolmates throughout their lives played a strong role in their desire to support museums in times of need.

This is because they felt that the physical museum space had played a significant role in their own lives.

People's appreciation and value of museums appeared to be inexorably linked with their past memories of museums they've visited, and a desire to return to those happy memories (especially post-COVID).

How might your campaign for support:

- Remind people of their past experiences of the museum?
- Remind people of the role that the museum has played in their lives to date?
- Remind people of their childhoods, adolescence or life-shaping experiences?
- Communicate how the public has shaped the museum's history, and is a part of its institutional memory?

How to foster long-term NOSTALGIA

Invite people to connect with longstanding objects in the collection.

Museums of all sizes will have particular objects that people remember, attach particular significance to, or that invoke feelings of awe or fascination. For many, they first see these objects in childhood, and many years later revisit the museum only to see the same objects, unchanged by the passage of time. How might museums encourage people to reconnect with objects in the museum that they were first fascinated by ten, twenty, or thirty years ago?

Aim to connect to other aspects of people's lives – music, contemporary culture, objects, or memories.

Nostalgia is a hugely sensory emotion – we feel nostalgic when we see our childhood toys in a charity shop, hear a song from our teenage years, or eat a dish that we first tasted on holiday with our partner. How might museums capitalise on emotions of nostalgia by subconsciously reminding people of the sights, sounds and smells of their first visit to the museum?

"All of [these photos] remind me of my childhood and my very first visit to that/any museum, they bring back happy memories of a great day out with my mum and a lifelong love of museums, which has followed on from that day."

Online community participant

OWNERSHIP

Museums enjoy especially strong support from the general public when they feel **ownership** – when they are invited to participate as equals, and able to influence the direction of the museum.

This might look like co-curation, community consultation groups or something as simple as holding a coffee morning to gather feedback about your museum from the local community.

How might your campaign for support:

- Make people feel they are able to instigate real change in your museum?
- Communicate that you are open to new ways of working?
- Communicate that you value diverse perspectives from across the community – regardless of expertise?
- Provide tangible ways that people can influence the museum?
- Provide people to actively participate in and shape the campaign?

How to foster long-term OWNERSHIP

Maintain sustained dialogue about the needs and priorities of the community.

For people to feel like they 'own' the museum in some way, it is not enough for their opinions need to be captured on a one-off basis. They need to feel like they are able to consistently and genuinely shape the museum's output around the needs of their community on a long-term basis.

Several museum professionals we spoke to as part of this research reported that they had witnessed in their careers 'tick box' approaches to community engagement – where the public had been consulted or co-created programmes as part of a two year funded project, but dialogue petered out as soon as the funding finished.

Tell the stories of current audiences through contemporary collecting.

Contemporary collecting marries the past, with the present and future, and allows your museum's current audience and supporters to feel like their lives and experiences are relevant not only to the museum as an institution, but as part of something 'bigger'. By inviting people to contribute to your collection – whether that's through oral history projects, object donations, co-creation or something as simple as a post-it note left as part of an exhibition display – you make them feel like they've left their mark on the museum, the topic or discourse under discussion, and history itself.

"People are only too willing to be vocal in support of the museum because they have opinions [about it]. If you wear a [museum] lanyard in Glasgow, you'll get some advice from the guy driving the taxi because they know and they care, and they've been talking about us. But that sense that the institution means something and does something for them is really fundamentally important."
St Mungo Museum Leadership

CURIOSITY

Curiosity about the world we live in, how it works, and who else has inhabited it before us drives people to visit museums.

It's the feeling that drives our desire to learn, expand our knowledge and seek out new ideas and perspectives. Feeling curious is the underlying emotion behind the desire to learn – so is closely tied to people's experiences and emotional connections to museums. People enjoy the opportunity to learn unusual facts, see things from another's point of view, understand why things work or to uncover a whole new world they knew nothing about.

How might your campaign for support:

- Make people feel curious about themselves?
- Make people feel curious about the world around them?
- Make people feel curious about things they thought they knew?
- Make people feel curious about other viewpoints and perspectives?
- Make people feel curious about familiar/unfamiliar subject matters?
- Make people realise how much they value the opportunity to be curious?

How to foster long-term CURIOSITY

Harness the power of questions.

Why can't chickens fly? Why did dodos go extinct? How did Van Gogh lose his ear? When did the Great Fire of London happen? Museums can foster curiosity by asking questions – not only about their collections but about us, as people. People value the opportunity to ask questions about the world we live in, as well as the opportunity to ask questions of the museum, and can need reminding of this value. Asking questions evokes emotions of curiosity, fascination and excitement, as we anticipate the reward of finding out new things.

Create a mystery to solve.

The satisfaction of solving a challenging mystery is incredibly emotionally rewarding. In recent years, several musicians have launched albums by [mysteriously projecting numbers onto famous landmarks](#) or cryptically leaving posters all over the world, with subtle clues about what they might be promoting. While the global scale of these campaigns is out of reach for most museums, the premise can be replicated by evoking the same emotions. How might museums create a sense of curiosity and intrigue by withholding information and capturing the public's attention with a mystery project or campaign?

EXCITEMENT

Regular museum goers feel **excited** about the prospect of visiting museums because their past experiences mean they're able to anticipate a great day out.

The emotion of excitement is also closely linked with feelings of novelty – the opportunity to see something new and out of the ordinary.

Research participants – particularly in our online community – were very likely to associate museums with feelings of excitement and anticipation. This was in part due to having had positive past experiences that they were expecting to replicate, but also in part because of the thrill of discovery – people couldn't wait to explore the stories, knowledge and history in museums' collections.

How might your campaign for support:

- Make existing visitors and supporters feel excited about their next visit?
- Entice new visitors by offering something exciting to capture their attention?
- incentivising support (for example – through crowdfunding incentives) through exclusive, exciting rewards
- Challenge perceptions of what your museum is and who your museum is for – make it feel exciting, fresh and different.

How to foster long-term EXCITEMENT

Challenge expectations of what a museum 'is' and what a museum 'does'.

It's easy to forget that though we, in the sector, are constantly exposed to examples of innovative new museum practices, many of the general public will have a narrow idea of what a museum 'is' and what a museum 'does', and think that museums aren't for them. Think of ways to offer non-traditional programming that gets people excited about things other than the collection – excited about socialising, excited about a new opportunity, excited about something they've never experienced before. Once you've changed their minds about what a museum 'is', excitement about the stories in your collection can follow after.

Create anticipation.

We feel excited when we're eagerly anticipating something we're looking forward to, because we know it's going to bring us pleasure. How can museums build a sense of anticipation for a new programme, exhibition or event, either through its marketing or by word of mouth?

AWE

Sometimes, people struggle to comprehend the size, history or authenticity of some museum objects. Museums ask them to suspend their disbelief in believing the amazing facts about the objects in their collections – which results in a sense of **awe**, fascination and wonder.

Many respondents in the online community we ran also reported that the sheer size of some objects or museum buildings they'd visited created a 'wow' moment that stopped them in their tracks.

How might your campaign for support:

- Remind people of the amazing, awe-inspiring nature of your collection, and how it makes them feel?
- Emphasise the scale, breadth and importance of your collection (particularly if it is under threat)?
- Tangibly communicate the value of something by comparing it to something else (of more/ less importance)?

How to foster long-term AWE.

Take advantage of scale.

Demonstrating the relative size of things can produce a feeling of awe in people. This can be the scale of your collection, the size of your building or emphasising the relative insignificance of something in comparison to something much larger (such as [this video](#) showing the relative size of tsunami waves compared to landmarks like the Eiffel Tower).

You can also create something awe-inspiring from a number of smaller things – for instance, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk dedicates an entire wall to a sign made up of [thousands of paper notes](#) left by visitors – communicating both the number of visitors, the size of the movement and aligning with the idea of people working together for a better future.

Aim to surprise.

To make people feel awe, you need to surprise them, by challenging what they think they know or how they currently understand the world. The science podcast [Stuff to Blow Your Mind](#) from hosts Robert Lamb and Joe McCormick covers a range of topics and quandaries, all designed to introduce listeners to amazing science and awe-inspiring concepts that they didn't even think possible.

Recommendations:

Creating campaigns that resonate emotionally



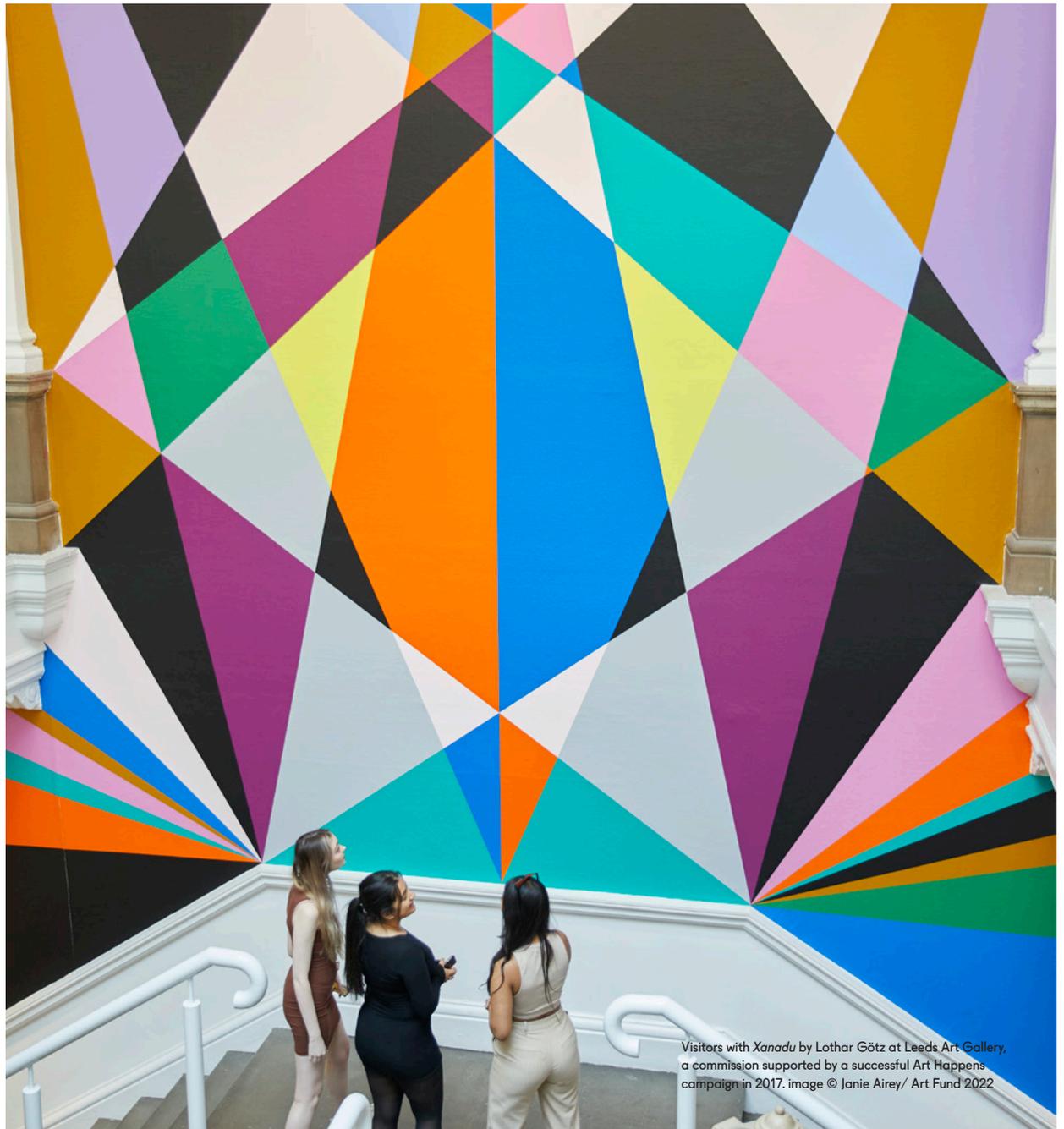
Exhibition view of the 'Yemen: Inside a Crisis' exhibition running at IWM North from 17th May 2019 to 20th January, 2020. Photographed 16th May, 2019. © IWM

HOW DO WE TRANSLATE THE EMOTIONAL POWER OF MUSEUM EXPERIENCES INTO EMOTIONALLY POWERFUL CAMPAIGNS FOR SUPPORT?

To mount successful public campaigns, arguments in support of the museum need to resonate on an emotional level in the public consciousness. Museums need to layer the 'practical' arguments for support (e.g. increased running costs, shortfall in funding) with one core emotional message.

This core emotional message acts as the 'catch' – it's been proven that it is emotion that moves us to act, rather than rational argument. To design an emotionally powerful campaign for support, we recommend taking four simple steps, using our nine key emotions as a springboard.

"Emotions work with cognition – thinking – to help us with attention, retention, and motivation. To be moved to action, we must not only understand the cause but feel strongly about it. Emotions are the seeds of movements." 'How Emotions Fuel Social Movements', Aida Fernandez Brillet



Visitors with *Xanadu* by Lothar Götz at Leeds Art Gallery, a commission supported by a successful Art Happens campaign in 2017. image © Janie Airey/ Art Fund 2022

A FOUR-STEP APPROACH TO BUILDING EMOTIONALLY RESONANT CAMPAIGNS

Approach	Example: a local museum looking to mount a crowdfunding campaign to help with energy costs.
<p>1. Remind people of their experiences.</p> <p>A publicity drive to simply remind people that they might have had positive experiences of your museum before, and to raise awareness of your museum in public consciousness.</p>	<p>Raising awareness of the museum’s situation in local/national press; re-contact e-news subscribers, reaching out to community groups; approaching lapsed Members or Friends; approaching local schools; speaking to your museum’s funder; contacting local council/MP. Speaking to peers across the sector.</p>
<p>2. Choose the audience for (and scope of) your campaign.</p> <p>By choosing to target “everyone”, you increase the risk of your campaign resonating with no one. Choose an audience for your campaign who you know are likely to be open to your messages. You might choose to target people demographically (by age or location) or by their motivation for engaging with the museum.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local families – people for whom a visit to the museum might have been a ‘coming of age’ experience across generations • People wanting to learn – visitors for whom the museum is a key source of knowledge and inspiring curiosity, and who would keenly feel its loss if it were to close • Local artist collective and community – people for whom the museum is a public space for inspiration, connection and socialising
<p>3. Lay out your rational arguments for support.</p> <p>Why, practically does your museum need support from the public? What’s in it for you? What’s in it for them? Who might the campaign benefit? Why now and not in the future?</p>	<p>Energy bills have risen from £500 per month, to £4000 per month. For context, the museum’s total income per month including all grants and funding is £6500.</p> <p>The £3.5k gap in funding means the museum will have to either close its schools programme or be forced to close for three days per week, meaning local school children (who have not had museum visits due to COVID-19) will lose out.</p> <p>The museum only has reserves to open with the shortfall for another 4 months.</p>
<p>4. Enhance your argument with 1-2 key emotions – and crucially, outline how that relates to your target audience.</p> <p>Which emotion is your museum best placed to play into? Why will this resonate with your target audience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nostalgia – invite people to recall what their first childhood school trip meant to them, and how their children would feel if they didn’t have the same opportunity. • Pride – how people would feel if the story of their local history was lost? • Hope – the museum played an integral part in mobilising community support when COVID-19 hit the town. It showed what was possible when communities come together to support one another – please show the same is true now in our time of need. • Ownership – the museum belongs to the town. We offer a space for those who need inspiration, relaxation or knowledge. The power to retain this amazing resource is in your hands.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOUNTING CAMPAIGNS

As part of the online community, we showed participants a selection of real-life campaigns from museums who were asking the public for support – mainly in the form of crowdfunding support, through Art Fund’s crowdfunding platform Art Happens. We asked them to tell us what they did and did not like about the campaigns – including what resonated with them on an emotional level and why.

Practical recommendation	Emotional resonance	Why it matters	Audience perspective
Challenge stereotypes of museums – what they do and who they are for.	PLEASURE & PURPOSE Surprise, Interest, Joy, Excitement, feeling Knowledgeable	Campaigns that push the boundaries of what people expect from museums are more likely to capture people’s attention – focus on how your museum is different and doing exciting things people wouldn’t necessarily expect.	<i>“As someone who didn’t visit an art gallery for a long period of time due to the impressive external appearance and coming from a family that visits museums but not art galleries, the aim of the [crowdfunding] project resonates with me. It seems to challenge the idea that art is stuffy and replaces it with the idea of a space that can be enjoyed by all and wishes to welcome all.”</i>
See campaigns for support as the beginning of a longer term relationship – update supporters on the progress of a campaign, so they feel involved and invested in the process.	CONNECTION & PURPOSE Ownership, Fulfilment, Duty, Inclusion	Museums need to think about their long-term engagement with supporters. If they’ve donated to a campaign, or pledged their name, how can the museum provide updates and keep people engaged in supporting the museum not only for the duration of the campaign but long-term as well? Continuing to communicate with supporters is key to developing long-term support.	<i>“I like the fact that they say by donating you will be included in helping transform this idea. Some donation campaigns just take the money and don’t keep you updated on how the end product is going which can make you feel a bit uncertain about whether or not they are doing what they actually said.”</i>
Be clear in communicating the benefit to the community.	PURPOSE Responsibility, Connectedness, Cohesion	A strong emotional driver for people supporting campaigns was being able to clearly and quickly – within a couple of seconds – recognise who the project stood to benefit and how their lives would be improved by it. This made people feel like their decision to support was tangibly making a difference to other people.	<i>“If I felt that the museum really served the community in a positive way, I would be inclined to support it. I would want to see them doing after school activities for children who can’t afford to pay premium prices or workshops for lower income neighbours to foster creativity”</i> <i>“I like that they are recognising that some people feel that art galleries aren’t for them – that they don’t know enough, aren’t good enough [and that they want to address that].”</i>

Practical recommendation	Emotional resonance	Why it matters	Audience perspective
<p>Strong headline and imagery for ease of sharing and advocating.</p>	<p>PLEASURE & CONNECTION</p> <p>Curiosity, Connection with community, Pride, Duty,</p>	<p>Campaigns that are attention grabbing, with interesting images, short videos and intriguing titles were more likely to capture people’s interest, and as a result also made them more likely to want to share the petition or crowd funder with their own networks.</p>	<p><i>“Although the sensible issues about the museum itself – the overall mission, the specific fundraising purpose etc., would be the deal breaker that would make me commit to donating money, it’s the image/video/language/topic used for the advertising that would need to draw me in, in the first place. There was a crowd funder for Wiltshire Museum recently (local to me) that appeared on my social media, which focused on curious children and some fun /cool/ interesting activities. After having a few of these popping up, I then clicked and was really interested in their campaign.”</i></p>
<p>In the case of fundraising, give people a tangible sense of how donations of any size make a difference, rather than focusing on what a large sum of money can do.</p>	<p>PURPOSE</p> <p>Surprise, Interest, Responsibility</p>	<p>Many respondents assumed that all museums were publicly funded by either local authorities or the government, and expressed surprise when they learnt that many museums are completely independently funded. Campaigns that emphasised the difference that a £5, £20 or £100 donation would make, and specifically what it would be spent on – appealed to people’s sense of civic responsibility, as well as making them feel surprised that museums weren’t funded in the way they’d expected.</p>	<p><i>Again, this campaign is good in that it explains broadly where the money is going, but I think it might be more effective if you were to put it in the way that Water Aid and other charities do, wherein they will say this amount of money will provide this specific thing and so on and so on. This way people will be able to see the direct impact of their actions.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’d be more engaged by something that gets right to the point: “Help us create a new vibrant space where everyone in your communities can enjoy and make art at The RWA in Bristol.” To me, the “help us raise £20k” is irrelevant. I’m not going to give £20k and neither will most public supporters. Give what I can with no pressure of scale on the other hand? Absolutely.”</i></p>
<p>Speak in layman’s language.</p>	<p>CONNECTION</p> <p>Relevant, Appreciated, Recognised</p>	<p>Campaigns that used emotive but straightforward language – talking about museums in the way the general public might, rather than the sector might – made campaigns feel relevant to people. They were scornful of campaigns that used language that was perceived as ‘buzz words’ because it made them feel alienated from the museum in question.</p>	<p><i>“Informal creativity?”. It’s too obviously written by someone who works in the arts/arts marketing. Why is art formal or informal, what does informal creativity mean? Can’t it just be art? Can’t it just be creative? If we’re marketing to the under-served, the vulnerable, young people etc, then the language needs to appeal to them or those who care for them.”</i></p>

Practical recommendation	Emotional resonance	Why it matters	Audience perspective
<p>Centre the campaign around people – both the staff and volunteers, and the visitors museums serve.</p>	<p>CONNECTION</p> <p>Connectedness, Inspired, Appreciated, Relevant</p>	<p>Potential supporters reacted best to campaigns when the plea for support came from visitors, volunteers and members of the committee who felt passionately that a museum should remain open or needed funds – not from museum trustees, directors or figures of authority such as MPs.</p>	<p><i>"I would've liked it to be more personal or relatable though – an org director introducing a campaign? No particular groups or communities identified? Some artsy phrasing that may or may not alienate more people than it engages? Easily misinterpreted by a cynical mind. I would've donated here based on the legacy of the space and the promise for a better, more inclusive offering. I was put off by some of the language that made it sound like I was donating in support of the gallery and objects – rather than people, if that makes any sense?"</i></p> <p><i>"Chances are that a senior member of staff is on a decent salary. Show me a community/project worker, or the beneficiaries of the project, who can demonstrate how we'll make "an art space for all".</i></p>
<p>Appeal to how museums make people feel – specifically around their memories and personal experience of the museum.</p>	<p>PLEASURE</p> <p>Nostalgia, Awe, Excitement, Pleasure, Joy, Delight, Curiosity</p>	<p>Reminding people of the positive emotions that a visit to the museum can provoke is one of the best ways to emotionally resonate with supporters. Evoking feelings of nostalgia, awe, curiosity and reminding people of their own personal connection to the museum is one of the strongest influences on people's decision to support.</p>	<p><i>"I don't think [museums] usually focus on these personal areas but I don't think it would be a bad thing if they did. Everyone is different and has different trigger points which engage them or they respond to and I'm sure that there must be lots of others who would love to engage on a more personal level. These connections go far deeper than the good the museums do and probably mean these people would potentially be the best advocates/supporters of these organisations"</i></p> <p><i>"The ones I know would definitely influence my decision are my personal experience and family connections. I don't think anyone could deny this and this would always sway me quicker than anything else. The nostalgia factor plays a big part in this."</i></p>



Long-term implications for museums, funders and IPSOs

Detail of Museum of the Moon and the Painted Hall, Museum of the Moon, Old Royal Naval College. Image © Annabel Moeller

FOR LONG-TERM EMOTIONAL RESONANCE, MUSEUMS NEED TO CONSIDER HOW THEIR OFFER SPEAKS TO AUDIENCES' EMOTIONS.

Mounting emotionally resonant campaigns in the short-term will always be necessary in the face of unpredictable circumstances.

However, to deepen the emotional connection that audiences have with museums, organisations need to think long-term about how their offer – their work and output – resonates with audiences to build long-term value.

This section of the report emphasises the importance of pleasure, purpose and connection in a museum's long-term outlook, and includes practical recommendations for fostering these types of emotions for funding bodies, sector support organisations (SSOs), Investment Principles Support Organisations (IPSOs) and museums themselves.



'Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest' (installation view),
People's History Museum, 23 March 2019 – 23 February
2020. Image courtesy of People's History Museum

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLEASURE

Museums need to consider ways to stimulate pleasurable emotions through fun, entertainment, humour and excitement. Museums that offer novelty and the pleasure of discovery enable repeat visitors to always find something new. Museums need to find ways of providing more gentle pleasure, such as feeling safe, relaxed, calm, content and having increased physical and mental wellbeing.

Museums offer the opportunity to learn, expand our worldview and to improve ourselves as a result – which all provoke positive emotions. Sometimes museums cover difficult topics evoking emotions of fear, anger, sadness, disgust or resentment and yet still contribute to a sense of self-improvement.

Museums can just have a good 'vibe' – the atmosphere of the building can be welcoming, 'buzzing' and friendly. Museums can be more than a collection or a place to learn – they are pleasant public places to be.

"A trip to the museum is a treat – a way to open our eyes to the wonders of the world, and a balm for the soul to appreciate the treasures."

Online community participant

"Really good fun, almost like a treasure hunt, and even now I think of the museum in that way – always unexpected things to find, going round a corner and seeing something you've never seen before."

Online community participant

How might museums bring pleasure to their audiences and communities...

- In ways that spark novelty and excitement, and offer something new?
- Ways that encourage repeat visits and spread positive word-of-mouth?
- In their museum spaces, for visitors and their parties?
- By emphasising that they are just a pleasurable public space to be in?
- In ways that inspire and motivate?
- In ways that provide a sense of challenge and make people feel they've achieved something?
- In times of crisis in the short-term?
- And in times of stability in a sustained and sustainable way?



A skiff under construction through Skylark IX Recovery Trust's Community Boatbuilding Project.
Photo: Martin Shields Photography

HOW TO FOSTER PLEASURE

Museums should consider:

- Which pleasurable emotions they are best suited to offer audiences. Are there ways you can make your collection playful and fun in a way you haven't before? If your museum isn't suited to fun, how might you make them feel relaxed? If your museum isn't designed to relax in, how might you foster confidence or wellbeing? Find the emotion your museum is best suited to offer and make sure that your audience knows that they can expect to feel that way when they visit you.
- How they can provide challenge – whether intellectual, physical or playful. Challenge can be an enormous source of satisfaction, thrill and joy for human beings. Solving problems makes us feel good about ourselves. How might museums provide challenges to stimulate visitors – such as games, tasks, conundrums or opportunities for discovery?
- How they can encourage visitors back after they've had a pleasurable experience. The key to harnessing pleasurable emotions is to re-attract visitors, so they become more emotionally invested after every visit. The goal is to move visitors on from purely pleasurable emotions such as fun or excitement to emotions of connection, and eventually purpose, so they become long-term supporters.

Funding bodies should consider:

- Providing financial help for audience research. Museums need to have a deep understanding of what their audience needs, wants and expects from a visit to a museum. Understanding the emotions they are hoping to feel from a visit can help museums design for those emotions.

Sector support organisations should consider:

- Ways in which they can encourage the sector to be bold and take risks, regardless of budget or resources. Museums who have redefined what a "museum" is – whether that's through innovative digital technologies like Rotterdam's Remastered, or by commandeering cardboard and art supplies like Queens Museum did to create their Art Lab interactive exhibition space – have seen surges of support because people appreciate the value of novel, surprising experiences.
- Providing tools, training and resources to help museums design for emotions. The journal Exhibition has produced some excellent themed issues around Designing Emotion and Fun in museums. IPSOs should consider ways in which approaches like those documented here can be encouraged in UK museums in ways that are pragmatic, effective and cost-effective.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION

Museums make audiences feel emotionally connected to other people, things and places. Museums have the potential to make people feel appreciated or valued by others, feel cohesion amongst community and society, make people feel humble and “part of something bigger” and ultimately enable the simple sense of feeling welcomed.

Those museums who have built strong emotional connections with their audiences have found it easier to leverage support from their community in times of crisis, because they have already built a bedrock of support amongst their communities.

There were four distinct different ways in which museums make people feel connected:

1. Feeling emotionally connected to COMMUNITY

Emotions such as feeling welcomed, valued and a sense of belonging through being accepted by a larger group of people.

2. Feeling emotionally connected to HISTORY

Emotions such as humility, remembrance and respect for the past, and a sense of feeling “part of” history, or “part of” something bigger.

3. Feeling emotionally connected to PLACE

‘Place attachment’, feeling an emotional bond with a place, whether that’s your home, a town, or the museum building itself.

4. Feeling emotionally connected to INDIVIDUALS

As well as feeling emotionally connected to their communities at large, museums offer the opportunity to socialise, feel bonded, share similarities and forge deep emotional connections with individuals – whether family, friends or meeting new people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION

People really value museums as places where they can connect not just to ideas, but also to people.

- Memories of museums were mostly about who they shared the experience with, particularly first-time experiences.
- Human connection with other people was also mentioned in the context of feeling welcomed. A friendly welcome or an insightful story told by a museum's staff and volunteers were consistently mentioned as something that makes a museum a favourite.
- Many favourite museums were large or national museums visited during holidays and day trips – whilst they didn't spark the same sense of connection to place that a local museum might have, there remained a strong emotional connection to a physical space that was the setting of a favourite memory.

How might museums foster a sense of meaningful emotional connection...

- Within their communities, and with different community groups?
- Within their town, city, county or nation, connecting with a sense of place?
- Within their museum spaces, for visitors and their parties?
- Between their audience, their collections, and across history and borders?
- Between individuals to create deep emotional bonds?
- In times of crisis in the short-term?
- And in times of stability in a sustained and sustainable way?

"[The exhibition] says, we support your right to freedom and your right to practice your faith unimpeded in Glasgow. That's really what the museum is actually about. It's about a neutral space where people can stand together."

St Mungo Museum Leadership

"I felt it connected all of us on a global scale – it is easy to forget all those who have come before us, but the history of the world is vast and diversity is astonishing. I love studying things that are wholly different to my own life and culture"

Online community participant



The Story Museum, Oxford, Finahist Art Fund's Museum of the Year 2022, © Emli Bendixen/ Art Fund

THE IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSE

Museums which had run campaigns appeared to have high levels of support from the general public when their museums were seen to be acting in the public interest, or when people felt strong personal emotions of purpose such as duty, responsibility, fulfilment or hope through their involvement with the museum.

In the face of threat, these emotions were most prevalent when people felt a duty to act in the interests of future generations, as they felt it was their responsibility to preserve history so their descendants could reap the same emotional benefits from museums that they currently did.

Museums need to understand what their communities – and the people of all ages within them – care about.

- What do they value?
- What is important to them?
- What provides their life with meaning?
- How can museums connect with issues that deeply matter to people?

By championing causes that people feel strongly about, museums can demonstrate how they are making a positive difference to the world. This might manifest as small changes or addressing more systemic issues.

How might museums foster a sense of PURPOSE?

- By proving the value they offer both to individuals and the community at large?
- By fostering a sense of duty and responsibility to future generations?
- By emphasising the important role that museums have to play in social action, and improving the lives and opportunities of their communities?
- By taking decisive action to tackle inequalities in our communities?
- In times of crisis in the short-term?
- And in times of stability in a sustained and sustainable way?

“Really and truly, if we didn’t try to keep it open, I think we would have all felt that we’d seriously let, not only the current community down, but also those generations to come”
Lowewood Museum Leadership



Audience for 'Modern Love Stories: Caleb Azumah Nelson with Rosie Wilby', Charleston, June 2021. © Janie Airey / Art Fund 2021

HOW TO FOSTER PURPOSE

Museums should consider:

- Embracing social action on a local, national and international scale. Consider ways in which your museum can take positive steps to improve local and national communities, and the world at large.
- Clearly communicating the purpose they serve in both community and society. While many museums already have social action initiatives or contribute in powerful ways to their communities, awareness of this purpose-driven action is often low. Communicate to the general public what you do, why it matters, who you benefit, where you're having an impact and how they can get involved to help.

Funding bodies should consider:

- Ring-fencing pots of money that further particular missions that the public care about. This might look like grants specifically for museum projects that tackle highly emotive subjects such as the climate crisis, community cohesion or other topics that serve a larger purpose than 'just' conserving heritage.
- Proactively encouraging museums to diversify the types of projects that they can apply for funding for. Many museums will apply for grants and funding for exhibitions, outreach programmes or capital projects, but funders could be encouraging museums to meet the needs of their communities and act for the public good. For example, by working with food banks like Ely Museum and Cornwall Museums Partnership have done.

- Funding or supporting museums to deliver more evaluation which includes SROI (Social Return On Investment) to evidence 'non-financial' purpose in a way that funders, legislators and corporate sponsors can understand and clearly compare (e.g. £).

Sector support organisations should consider:

- Continuing to take a place-based approach to cultural projects that encourage social action. Projects such as Place Based Social Action (PBSA) from DCMS and the National Lottery Community Fund and Arts Council's Let's Create agenda demonstrate the power that museums and fellow arts organisations have in delivering purpose-led programming for local communities. The Arts Council's vision for [Let's Create](#) is of "A country transformed by culture. Bringing us together, happier, healthier, to excite, inspire, delight. To enrich our lives". Museums have the potential to change the way our communities operate and to improve the lives of those within them.
- Establishing new partnerships with purpose-led organisations. Consider where the sector can partner with organisations and charities such as the [National Citizen Service](#) and [Nacro](#) to design museum programming with purpose.

"It's important to ensure we are standing up for what we believe in and for me, the history, education and community hub that museums act as and provide, are why we must ensure they are protected. And for me personally it feels a duty to ensure the generations coming after me and for those wishing to further their education and dive into the past have that same experience."

Online community participant



Golden disk exhibit in We The Curious.
© We The Curious - Lisa Whiting

Appendix:

Best practice & case studies

BEST PRACTICE: PURPOSE

Horniman Museum & Gardens' *Reset Agenda*

The Horniman Museum won Art Fund's 2022 Museum of the Year Award, in recognition of their audience and community-focused work that sprang out of their *Reset Agenda*.

The pandemic and the murder of George Floyd both acted as catalysts for the Horniman to completely overhaul its strategy and public programme so that social justice, community representation and consultation, and the climate crisis were the driving forces behind its work.

Some of the *Reset Agenda*'s purpose-led aims include:

- Consulting people and working in partnership
- Addressing the [colonial] history and legacy of the Horniman business
- Diversifying staff and volunteers
- Making the Horniman greenhouse gas neutral and more biodiverse

The programmes they have since created in partnership with their local communities include *696: Celebrating Black music in south London*, a family friendly food and music festival (with the title referencing the Metropolitan Police's risk assessment form that racially discriminated against Black British music events) and planting a micro-forest to help to tackle air pollution and provide new wildlife habitats in South London.



Horniman Museum and Gardens, London,
Winner of Art Fund's Museum of the Year 2022,
© Emili Bendixen/ Art Fund

BEST PRACTICE: CONNECTION

Yemen: Inside a Crisis marketing campaign

IWM North in Manchester promoted its exhibition *Yemen: Inside a Crisis* – part of its Contemporary Conflict programme – by designing a campaign that intended to make people feel emotionally connected to Yemeni people, almost ten million of whom are suffering from extreme hunger. The slogan ‘Price of War’ was cleverly designed so as to initially read as ‘Price War’, challenging people to think how they’d feel if they too were faced – in 2019 – with paying £50 for a flat white or tens of pounds for a box of eggs in their local supermarket. IWM even installed an ‘unaffordable’ vending machine in Manchester Piccadilly station.

While the campaign initially prompts emotions such as shock, surprise, pity and empathy, by centering the exhibition creative around a fundamental human need that unites us all – food – the campaign makes people feel connected to our fellow humans, regardless of place, nationality or time period, by making the crisis in Yemen relevant to our own lives.



Exhibition view of the 'Yemen: Inside a Crisis' exhibition running at IWM North from 17th May 2019 to 20th January, 2020. Photographed 16th May, 2019. © IWM

BEST PRACTICE: PLEASURE

The Story Museum, Oxford

The Story Museum was shortlisted for Art Fund's Museum of the Year award in 2022 for its work nurturing children's imaginations and inspiring them through the fun, excitement and magic of storytelling. Having reopened after a £6m redevelopment in 2021, in just twelve months they are already seeing families revisiting numerous times, due to a reputation for being "a magical experience for kids and parents alike".

"All the wonderful things here at the Story Museum are extraordinary and multifarious. A whispering wood; an enchanted library; you can step through the wardrobe into Narnia; you can play Pooh sticks; you can fall down Alice's rabbit hole. It is a place unlike any other with a surprise around every corner. We provide the backdrop, the children provide the action with their imagination"

Sophie Hiscock: Director of Communications & Impact

Designing elaborate sets and exhibitions on the same scale as the Story Museum may not be easily replicable for other museums. But designing for emotion is replicable on any scale and with any budget. Duan et al. Discuss how exhibition designers frequently use hands-on experiences, sensory stimulation and opportunities for social interaction to trigger and hold people's interest². The Story Museum is an example of how using emotionally-centred design practices can result in an exciting, magical and wonder-inspiring experience that brings pleasure to its audiences.

² Interest, emotions, relevance: viewing science centre interactive exhibit design through the lens of situational interest. Ruoyu Jenny Duan, Graham J. Walker & Lindy A. Orthia. International Journal of Science Education, Part B, Volume 11, 2021 – Issue 3.



The Story Museum, Oxford, Finartist Art Fund's Museum of the Year 2022, © Emli Bendixen/ Art Fund

CASE STUDIES

Evoking PRIDE



Visitors explore The Cardiff Story/Stori Caerdydd. Image courtesy Amgueddfa Caerdydd

The Cardiff Story Museum

The Cardiff Story Museum is a social history museum that encourages local residents “to explore the history of their local area thereby increasing knowledge and understanding of their surroundings, increasing sense of identity and sense of pride of their areas”. The museum has worked to both foster emotions of pride and belonging in Cardiff as a city, by working with the Communities First programme, a community programme that supports the Welsh Government’s Tackling Poverty agenda. As part of the programme, the museum has run a variety of workshops aimed at different communities who are experiencing poverty, helping them to both gain new skills for employment through researching and understanding their local heritage.

Evoking CURIOSITY



‘Project What If?’ exhibition at We The Curious © We The Curious – Lisa Whiting

Project What If? We The Curious

“Come and play, turn invisible, peer inside the Tardis, broadcast a message into space, think about what makes you unique... and then leave us your own burning questions”: this was the invitation from We The Curious, an aptly-named science centre in Bristol. Project What If is an exhibition to crowdsource 10,000 burning questions – about anything and everything – from the people of Bristol. The museum boiled down these questions to just seven intriguing questions about some of life’s big mysteries, such as ‘why do rainbows make people happy?’ The project capitalises on people’s curiosity, whilst offering them the pleasure and satisfaction of discovering more about the world we live in.

CASE STUDIES

Evoking BELONGING



Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Sister Isabel Smyth and Mrs Brij Lata Gandhi representing Glasgow's Sikh, Christian and Hindu communities at the reopening of the St. Mungo Museum Of Religious Life & Art to the public 14 September 2022. © Glasgow Life/Glasgow Museums

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow

One of the seven case study museums we interviewed in depth, the award winning St Mungo Museum “aims to promote understanding and respect between people of different faiths and those of none, and offers something for everyone”. The museum has a long history of deep community consultation, and aims to foster belonging within Glasgow by deepening relationships within and between different interfaith communities and religious groups. It encourages people of all (or no) faiths to see what unites, rather than divides, us through community dialogue, and aims to unite all of Glasgow’s citizens, regardless of their religion.

Evoking HOPE



The Exhibition of Hope at the National Wool Museum, October 2021 – January 2022. Courtesy Amgueddfa Cymru

The Exhibition of Hope, The National Wool Museum, Wales

This exhibition started in April 2020 as a project to crowdsource enough knitted, crocheted or stitched squares to create a blanket to place in the museum’s collection to remember the first national COVID-19 lockdown. Adopting – like many community organisations – the rainbow as a symbol of hope in dark times, the museum hoped the rainbow blanket would “symbolise light at the end of the tunnel after a dark and uncertain time. The blanket would therefore hopefully become a symbol of peace, hope, community and spirit.” The sense of community in this shared endeavour created a sense of hope that people across Wales were all in this together, and could come out the other side of the pandemic with one another’s support.

CASE STUDIES

Evoking NOSTALGIA



The Museum of Broken Relationships. Courtesy the museum. Photo: Mare Milin

The Museum of Broken Relationships

This museum in Zagreb, Croatia, was mentioned by one of our online community participants as being her favourite museum that she's ever visited, because it made her feel nostalgic for the simultaneously happy and painful memories of relationships that have since ended. The museum is a global crowd-sourced project which invites people whose relationships have recently ended to submit stories or ephemera from their relationship, to "take part in the creation of a collective emotional history". They invite contributors to be "frank, withdrawn, furious, imaginative, witty or sad" in their submissions, and the hugely emotional nature of the stories in their collection has the effect of creating an intensely life affirming experience that reminds people of their own life experiences while also reminding them that they're not alone in feeling heartbreak.

Evoking OWNERSHIP



Union Street Party 2020, Nudge Community Builders, Plymouth. Photo: Dom Moore

Nudge Community Builders, Plymouth

A group of local volunteers started Nudge, a Community Benefit Society, in the Stonehouse area of Plymouth in 2017. They have worked with partners such as **Eat Work Art** to gradually reclaim and renovate disused buildings on Union Street, a former high street that had become run down. Its name came about because they wanted to create a sense of community ownership by:

- Nudging local buildings and spaces to be used and loved
- Nudging local people and businesses to be brave, creative, resilient and healthy, supporting themselves and their local community.
- Nudging local and national change for communities by using our voice and leading by example.

CASE STUDIES

Evoking AWE



Detail of Museum of the Moon and the Painted Hall, Museum of the Moon, Old Royal Naval College, 13 December 2022 – 5 February 2023
© Luke Jerram. Photo © Annabel Moeller

Museum of the Moon

The Museum of the Moon is an art installation by artist Luke Jerram, and combines a 7 metre wide illuminated moon with an accompanying soundscape to create a true feeling of awe in the people who visit it. It has travelled around UK venues from cathedrals to swimming pools to Glastonbury Festival and allows people to view ultra detailed NASA imagery of the lunar surface, creating a truly spectacular “wow” moment. The sheer size of the imitation moon compared to the spot we usually see in the night’s sky, along with the opportunity to see the lunar surface at close range in close detail provides a feeling of wonder and appreciation for our closest neighbour, when we might normally overlook it.

Evoking RELEVANCE



Protest Lab objects on display in 'Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest', People's History Museum, 23 March 2019 – 23 February 2020. Image courtesy of People's History Museum

Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest at the People's History Museum

This 2019 exhibition at the People's History Museum aimed to mark the 200th anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819 by making it more relevant for a 2019 audience. They created a 'Protest Lab', a creative space inside the exhibition where visitors could share their views, belongings and ideas for protest and collective action. By exhibiting nineteenth century artefacts alongside placards and protest ephemera from present day protests, the museum acknowledged that while the issues people have been protesting have evolved over 200 years, the degree to which these issues matter to people's lives is universal, making the Peterloo Massacre more relevant to people's lives in the present.

CASE STUDIES

Evoking FULFILMENT



Skylark IX crew rowing "Happy Days" which they built themselves in the Denny workshop space. Photo: Dumbarton Community Member Joe Brown

Skylark IX Recovery Project

One of the case studies for this research, the Skylark IX Recovery Project is the perfect example of how people can gain a sense of personal fulfilment from museum and heritage settings. Based at the Scottish Maritime Museum's Denny Tank, the Skylark IX Recovery Trust helps people "to make positive changes to their lives and communities" by offering a boat building project for people in recovery from drug addiction. The theme of recovery runs through both their work with conserving the Skylark IX (a Dunkirk 'little ship' that sank on the River Leven in 2010); the boat's history recovering 600 exhausted soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940; and the recovery of local residents from addiction. The themes of recovery and resilience that run through the project evoke emotions of fulfilment and purpose, as well as the joy of feeling we've made a difference.

Evoking EXCITEMENT



Secret Museum by the Museum of Homelessness Photo: Anthony Luvera

The Secret Museum, The Museum of Homelessness

The Museum of Homelessness won an M&H award for its project The Secret Museum in 2021. Described as 'part treasure hunt, part immersive experience, part theatre, part museum experience', the experience begins by trying to hunt out fellow visitors (indistinguishable apart from coloured wrist bands) before being collected by a drive-by cyclist playing music on a boombox. The cyclists lead you on a search for spray-painted flamingos around the streets of London, ending up at the Secret Museum in a series of dark tunnels, where the stories of the museum's objects are told through a spoken word performance. Despite the quirky novelty of a museum experience unlike any other, the excitement of the scavenger hunt to find the museum didn't take away from the emotional gravity of the objects inside, proving that light-hearted emotions can work alongside more serious ones.