

Many curators manage museums on their own, with only a small support staff or teams of volunteers. The responsibility of forging relationships with governing bodies, gaining or retaining Accreditation, developing audiences, managing volunteers, fund raising and ensuring the safety of visitors can become overwhelming. MMN is a mutually supportive network for those museum managers that will assist them in the management of museums and collections, encourage greater resilience, confidence, and nurture professional development. This guide is designed to support managers starting work at organisations that don't have any (or many) paid staff but can be useful to anyone working autonomously in museums.

### Who Can Help?

**Share Museums East-** Runs a comprehensive programme of development opportunities for museums of all sizes and types. [sharemuseumseast.org.uk](http://sharemuseumseast.org.uk)

**Museum Development Officers-** Your MDO will know who's who and what's what at all the museums in your area. Most Counties in the East of England has one, they are there to support accredited museums and museums working towards accreditation. [sharemuseumseast.org.uk/contact](http://sharemuseumseast.org.uk/contact)

**Neighbouring Museums-** Staff at volunteers at nearby organisations can be a great source of support and advice. Arrange a meeting to introduce yourself and find out how you might be able to work together. Identify someone doing a similar job to yours at a nearby museum, they will know who can help and which meetings are worth going to and may have encountered many of the challenges you are about to.

**Trustees –** Take every opportunity to get to know the people responsible for your museum as early as you can. Remember they won't necessarily have a lot of training or experience of museum management so finding out the strengths and weaknesses of your board as early as possible is important.

**Past Employees-** Even if this is the first time your museum has appointed someone with your job title find out who did what before you arrived. Trustees and volunteers may have been responsible for a particular role in the past and can be a great source of support. If you are taking over from someone ask if you can call on them for advice. Succession planning in small museums is often nonexistent and having a good relationship with your predecessor can be invaluable.

### Get to know your Volunteers

Start building a relationship with your volunteers. Hold a tea party, join them for their lunch break, hold a one to one with everyone and ask what everyone thinks about the museum. Find out as much about them as soon as you can, knowing who's who is vital if you want to implement change without alienating anyone.

### Network

Take advantage of the networks and forums in your area. Try and encourage your volunteers or trustees to attend training and network events too. The more they know about best practice and what's happening at other museums the more they will understand what you're trying to do and will stand up for you and your plans when others are not convinced.

## Don't Panic

It is important to get a work / life balance defined from the very beginning so bad habits don't become entrenched. It is so easy to fall into the trap of taking too much on because you want to prove, as the only paid member of staff, that you are worth it. The competition for museum jobs can make you feel so lucky to have got one that you try to be super curator. If you do this you will be inefficient, burnt out, resentful, no good to anyone or your museum and no one will like you any more for it. Don't forget, it is a huge learning curve- for you and the organisation! You don't need to be perfect. As a lone professional in a museum you may be called to lead on many aspects of museum work that you have not been trained in – learn your strengths, identify your weaknesses, and look to developing your skills, and those of your organisation.

## Fact Finding

Take some time to investigate your museum early on. Find out:

- The legal position of the museum, who owns the building and the collections.
- If the museum is meeting its health and safety responsibilities, has up-to-date emergency plans, risk assessments, insurance and first-aid procedures and test all the fire alarms.
- Who uses the museum what existing visitor data is there and how current is it?
- Who supports the museum? What income model or external funding does the museum operate on and how secure is it financially?

Once you have gathered all the information you can, identify any immediate risks to the museum and find out what is being done to manage them. Find the forward plan and current policies so you don't have to reinvent the wheel. If your museum does have an up-to-date plan find out how familiar your trustees and volunteers are with it and how well it's being implemented.

## Review

Go softly, it's a marathon not a sprint, when you are new to an organisation and you are not immediately caught up in the day to day and you can take an 'outsider's view' of your museum – its assets, opportunities, collections, people, and stakeholders. Jot down ideas, problems, priorities and goals and take stock and plan your changes. Try and build your trustees and your volunteers into both immediate plans and long term goals.

## Change

When things need changing you will more than likely have to balance the pursuit of professional standard with the personalities of the people involved with your organisation. Communication is important – keep people aware of what needs to be done and why. People are often resistant to change, have a sense of ownership over the museum and may like things the way they are! Explain why change is needed and what the benefits will bring.

# Accreditation

Don't get caught out- Find out when you are due to return on accreditation and what the points to work on for next time were. The date can be found on ACE website

[www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/accreditation-returns](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/accreditation-returns)

If your museum isn't accredited talk to your MDO about becoming an accredited museum. Once you are working towards accreditation you can access support and training. Using the accreditation standards can also be an effective way to introduce changes and improvements to your organisation.

## Collections

It is easy to get caught up in the front facing aspects of the museum, but make time to look through your collections and documentation. Find out what has been done - and what needs doing. You don't need to work on it straight away, but knowledge is key, and it will give you a level of confidence

# Useful Resources

Share Museums East

[sharemuseumseast.org.uk](http://sharemuseumseast.org.uk)

Arts Council England

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Association of Independent Museums:

[www.aim-museums.co.uk](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk)

Collections Trust

[collectionstrust.org.uk](http://collectionstrust.org.uk)

Heritage Lottery Fund:

[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

Museums Association

[www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)

South and East Museums Federation

[www.semfed.org.uk](http://www.semfed.org.uk)



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